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HISTORY

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HENRY'S ASSASSINS

The Tudor king's secret hunt for traitors



A detailed oil painting portrait of King Henry VIII of England. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a rich red robe with a white collar and a gold chain necklace. He has a full, reddish-brown beard and mustache. His hair is powdered and styled in a large, white, ruff collar. The background is dark and indistinct.

Giants, dragons & Middle Earth

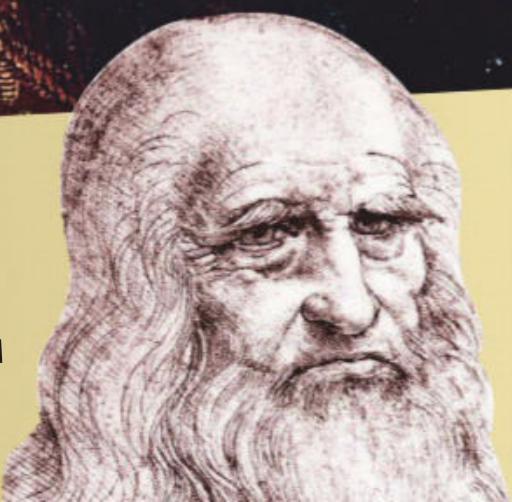
The Anglo-Saxon fear of the past

1979

BRITAIN IN MELTDOWN

PLUS

LEONARDO DA VINCI'S VISIONS OF THE FUTURE



Queen Victoria 200th Birth Anniversary

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MAY 2019

WELCOME

As we go to press, the news agenda in Britain continues to be dominated by Brexit. And while it would be dangerous to predict how things will have developed by the time you read these words, it's clear that both the country and parliament are divided. Of course, history provides several examples of similar periods of flux, and in this month's issue we're **zoning in on 1979** when political tensions were also running high. On page 30, BBC journalist and producer Phil Tinline takes the mood of the country 40 years ago.

The ultimate outcome of this period was 11 years of rule by **Margaret Thatcher's** Conservatives. On the anniversary of her accession to power, we've asked four experts to reflect on this pivotal period of British history. Was it her political ideology or broader forces that fuelled the transformations of the 1980s? And do we still live in Thatcher's Britain? Find out our historians' views from page 36.

Back in the 16th century, English politics was decidedly bloodier, especially if you were in **opposition to Henry VIII**. As Robert Hutchinson reveals in this month's cover feature, the Tudor king was prepared to take extreme measures to hunt down his enemies, whether at home or abroad. Turn to page 20 to read more about Henry's brutal, but often bungling, assassins.

Finally, this month sees the release of tickets for our **weekend events in Winchester and Chester**. There are more details on page 58 and make sure to check out our June edition, which will contain a full guide to the exciting line-ups for 2019.

Rob Attar

Editor



THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS



Sarah Knott

My feature highlights the large transformation I discovered in writing *Mother: An Unconventional History*. From the 17th century, declining family sizes had a significant impact on women's lives.

● *Sarah traces the west's fertility decline from the 17th to 20th centuries on page 60*



Anita Anand

The Raj is still evoked as a golden age of British might, but it's useful to remember what was needed to achieve that might.

● *Anita discusses her new book on one man's quest to avenge the Amritsar Massacre on page 67*



Joanne Cormac

I'm fascinated by 19th-century music and culture, and love unearthing entertainments that were hugely popular to the Victorians but have since fallen out of fashion.

● *Joanne introduces the mixture of titillation and elitism that was Victorian burlesque on page 44*

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CONTENTS

Features



Discover why Britain was in political and cultural turmoil 40 years ago, on page 30

20 Henry's hitmen

Bribery, subterfuge, kidnap and murder by paid assassins. Robert Hutchinson reveals how Henry VIII targeted his enemies

26 In the shadows of giants

When the Anglo-Saxons encountered the ancient burial sites and Roman remains that dot Britain, they were gripped by wonder and dread, says Tim Flitton

30 1970s: Britain in meltdown

The United Kingdom in the 12 months before the 1979 general election was a country on the edge, says Phil Tinline

36 1970s: Thatcher's Britain?

Did Margaret Thatcher engineer a decisive break with the past? Four historians offer their expert perspectives on her years in power

44 Victorian cheap thrills

Titillation, humour and a dash of high culture. Joanne Cormac explores the strange world of 19th-century burlesque

50 Leonardo da Vinci

From flying machines to geology, Marina Wallace explores the groundbreaking work of the genius polymath

60 Motherhood revolution

Over four centuries in the west, a decline in family sizes has radically changed women's lives, argues Sarah Knott

Every month

6 ANNIVERSARIES

11 HISTORY NOW

- 11 The latest history news
- 14 Backgrounder: Kashmir
- 16 Past notes: passports

17 MICHAEL WOOD'S VIEW

18 LETTERS

67 BOOKS

The latest releases reviewed, plus Anita Anand discusses her book on the Amritsar massacre's aftermath

77 TV & RADIO

The pick of new history programmes

80 OUT & ABOUT

- 80 History Explorer: British cinema
- 85 Five things to do in May
- 86 My favourite place: Rome

93 MISCELLANY

- 93 Q&A and quiz
- 94 Samantha's recipe corner
- 95 Prize crossword

98 MY HISTORY HERO

Frank Gardner on Wilfred Thesiger

EVENTS

58 History Weekend tickets on sale this month

48 SUBSCRIBE

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67

Anita Anand on how an assassin plotted revenge for 20 years



GETTY/BRIDGEMAN/ALISTAIR LEVY

44

Saucy satire. How the Victorians reinvented burlesque for middle-class audiences



36

Are we still living in
Thatcher's Britain?



26

Here be dragons and deadly curses? Why
ancient sites scared the Anglo-Saxons



50

Leonardo da Vinci's
most radical visions

20

"HENRY VIII'S CAMPAIGN TO ELIMINATE HIS ENEMIES ABROAD WAS AUDACIOUS, SINISTER AND BRUTAL, YET IT FAILED"



ANNIVERSARIES

10 May 1655

Oliver Cromwell's forces attack Jamaica

The unplanned seizure of the Caribbean island becomes a turning point in England's scramble for foreign colonies

At the end of 1654, one of the largest fleets in English history left Portsmouth for the Caribbean. Having declared war on Spain, Oliver Cromwell had conceived a 'Western Design' to seize the island prize of Hispaniola. Unfortunately, the expedition was a fiasco, and the fleet's 3,000 English marines completely failed to capture the island's capital at Santo Domingo. "In one afternoon," one historian has noted, "the invincible reputation of the New Model Army had been thrown away."

Reluctant to return without a consolation prize, the admiral, Sir William Penn, turned instead to another Spanish island, Jamaica, which was much less well defended. On 10 May 1655 the fleet sailed into Cagway Bay and opened fire on the little Spanish battery. The

marines disembarked and, after six days, Penn concluded a treaty with the Spanish commander, with England annexing Jamaica and all Spanish residents promising to leave.

As acquisitions go, Jamaica seemed little more than a booby prize. Within days the English victors had fallen seriously ill. When the fleet finally limped home, Cromwell was so furious at the failure to take Hispaniola that he had Penn thrown into the Tower. Yet in the long run this was a hugely significant moment. With its rich sugar resources, Jamaica transformed the English diet, and it soon became England's chief slave colony, at the centre of the booming Atlantic trade. Above all, the English state – not just private companies – was now a key player in the scramble for colonies.



The first English map of Jamaica (1671), made less than two decades after England captured the island from the Spanish

10 May 1849

Theatre fans turn nasty

Bitter feelings over a stage rivalry lead to a tragedy of epic proportions

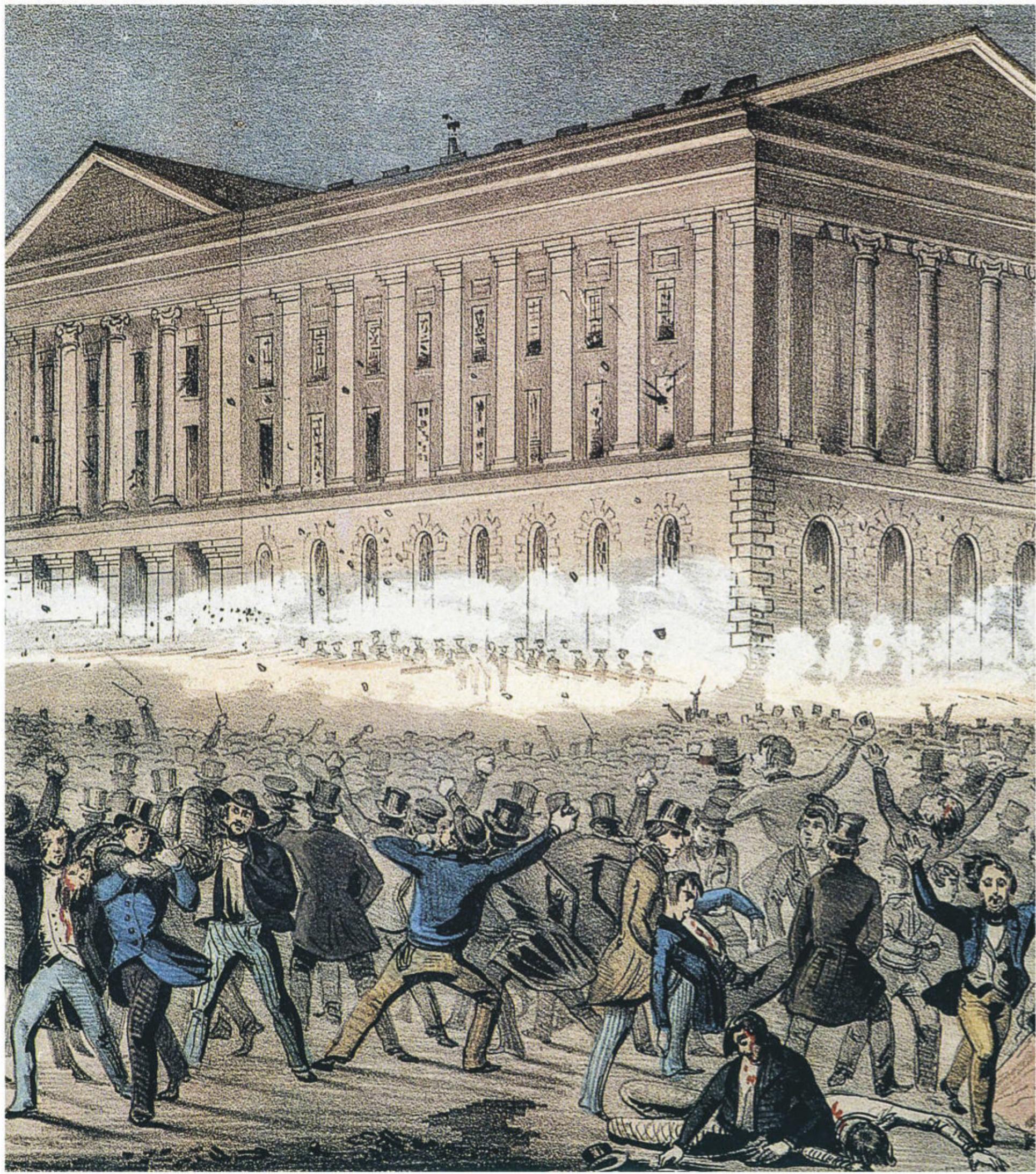
Shakespeare's plays often provoke strong feelings, and *Macbeth* is no exception. Even so, when the British actor William Charles Macready arrived in New York in 1849 to play the Scottish usurper, he could hardly have expected that local objections to his performance would see at least two dozen people killed and more than a hundred injured.

The violence on 10 May was rooted in the long-running rivalry between Macready, probably the finest Shakespearean actor of his generation, and his American rival Edwin Forrest. Both men had toured in Britain and the US, with Macready enjoying the greater success. Even in New York, discerning patrons agreed that Macready was better. But in the aggressively nationalistic, anti-English climate of the 1840s – especially among Irish immigrants – it was dangerous to say so.

In early May, Macready was booked in to play *Macbeth* at the Astor Opera House in downtown Manhattan. But during his performance on 7 May, the theatre was invaded by Forrest's working-class partisans, who ripped up the seats and threw fruit, vegetables and shoes at the stage. Not surprisingly, the shocked Macready announced that he would return to Britain immediately. But after a petition of the American literary elite, among them Herman Melville and Washington Irving, he agreed to give another performance, three days later.

The result was a disaster. By the time the curtain rose on 10 May, 10,000 people had surrounded the theatre, many of them drunk. Soon after the mob had tried to set the theatre on fire, the authorities called in the militia. Shots rang out: dozens fell. They had paid a high price for their theatrical taste.

Dominic Sandbrook is a historian and broadcaster. He has presented numerous programmes on BBC TV and radio



A contemporary lithograph depicts the bloody riot that occurred outside the Astor Opera House in 1849. What began as a disagreement over Shakespeare ended in the theatre being swarmed by a 10,000-strong mob

Anniversaries

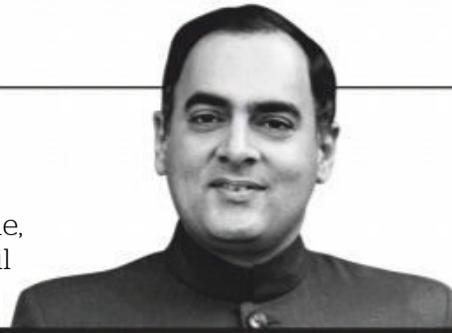


16 May 1929

In Los Angeles, the **first Academy Awards** are handed out at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel.

21 May 1991

Former Indian **prime minister Rajiv Gandhi**, along with 14 other people, is assassinated by a Tamil Tiger suicide bomber.



30 May 1942

More than **a thousand British aircraft** cross the Channel for a massive bombing raid on the German city of Cologne.



The first-ever performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is depicted in a lithograph from 1879.
The composer is pictured standing behind conductor Michael Umlauf

7 May 1824

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony delights Vienna

Deaf and struggling with ill health, the composer nonetheless enjoys one of his greatest triumphs

In the spring of 1824, Ludwig van Beethoven was 53 years old. Exhausted, ill and by now almost totally deaf, he had spent years working on his epic Ninth Symphony, and originally planned to stage the premiere in Berlin. But after a petition from bigwigs in Vienna, where he remained enormously popular, Beethoven agreed that it would go ahead

in the city's splendid Theater am Kärntnertor on 7 May 1824. The performance has gone down in musical legend.

Since the composer's deafness made him a very unreliable director, the orchestra followed their own director, Michael Umlauf, during the rehearsals, while Beethoven sat on the stage, turning

the pages of his manuscript and beating time for musicians he could not hear.

The performance, attended by the great and the good of Viennese society, followed a similar formula. Beethoven "stood in front of a conductor's stand and threw himself back and forth like a madman", one musician recalled. "At one moment he stretched to his full height, at the next he crouched down to the floor, he flailed about with his hands and feet as though he wanted to play all the instruments and sing all the chorus parts."

When the last notes died away, Beethoven carried on conducting. He did not even hear when the audience burst into frenzied applause. Only when the young singer Caroline Unger walked over and gently turned him around did he realise that it was all over – and that the public loved it.

28 May 1644

Blood is shed in Bolton

Royalists massacre civilians in one of the darkest incidents of the Civil War

It was late on 28 May 1644, and the Angel of Death was approaching Bolton. After almost two years of war, England was bleeding, and now a royalist army under Prince Rupert of the Rhine was marching north towards the Lancashire town, whose reputation as a hotbed of Puritanism had earned it the nickname 'the Geneva of the North'.

By this point in the war, Lancashire had become a parliamentarian stronghold, but now Rupert's advance seemed irresistible. Having taken Stockport three days earlier, he was moving so quickly that his Roundhead adversaries could scarcely retreat fast enough. By the time he reached Bolton, the skies were darkening and rain was pouring down, but Rupert ordered his men to attack anyway.

The first attack was repulsed with several hundred casualties, but when Rupert's men attacked again, accompa-



ILLUSTRATION BY LUKE WALLER

The advance of Prince Rupert's royalist troops caused panic in the parliamentarian stronghold of Bolton, as our illustration depicts

nied by the Earl of Derby, the defenders' morale broke.

As the parliamentarian soldiers turned and fled, Rupert's men burst into the streets of Bolton. Since everything had happened too fast for a formal surrender, there was no chance for the townsfolk to flee or even to negotiate terms. Exactly how many died remains uncertain, but parliamentarian propaganda never failed to make the most of it.

One eyewitness claimed to have seen

"children crying for their fathers, women crying out for their husbands, some of them brought on purpose to be slain before their wives' faces". He also recalled seeing "the rending, tearing and turning of people naked, the robbing and spoiling of all the people of all things that they could carry... the massacring, dismembering, cutting of dying or dead bodies and boasting, with all new-coined oaths swearing how many Roundheads... they had killed that day." ■

COMMENT / Jonathan Healey

"One writer lamented how Bolton had become a 'nest of owles and a den of dragons'"

“The most 'objective' record we have on the attack on Bolton is the parish register, which states that 78 inhabitants were killed. Too many, of course, but hardly in keeping with the bloodier figures you sometimes see. The main royalist newspaper reported triumphantly that at least 800 'rebels' had been killed, but other Cavalier accounts give an even bigger figure: 1,600 to 2,000.

The military significance of what happened that day was fairly minimal. Prince Rupert went on to take Liverpool, before tramping across the Pennines to oblivion at Marston Moor. The north fell to

parliament. But the event's propaganda value was considerable. In August, a tract entitled *An Exact Relation of the Bloody and Barbarous Massacre at Bolton in the Moors in Lancashire* hit the London bookstalls. Allegedly by an eyewitness, it contained gory tales of atrocities against civilians, and lamented that Bolton, formerly a "sweet godly place", had been left a "nest of owles and a den of dragons". Although it guessed at 1,200 or 1,500 soldiers' deaths on both sides, it didn't give a figure for civilian casualties.

Bolton recovered: its rise to become one of England's leading textile towns –

working raw cotton imported from Turkey and Syria – was unstoppable. But Rupert's reputation didn't. Nor did that of the Earl of Derby. When the earl was captured in 1651, he was court-martialled and beheaded at Bolton's market cross. The town had had its vengeance.



Jonathan Healey
is associate professor of history at Kellogg College, University of Oxford. He specialises in the social and economic history of early modern England



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HISTORY NOW

Have a story? Please email Charlotte Hodgman at
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EYE OPENER

Da Vinci rediscovered?

A work of art, believed by some to be Leonardo da Vinci's only surviving sculpture, has been unveiled in Italy. The Virgin with the Laughing Child, pictured here, has previously been attributed to Italian sculptor Antonio Rossellino, a contemporary of da Vinci, but Italian scholar Francesco Caglioti has claimed it is the work of da Vinci himself.

The small terracotta sculpture, which has been in the V&A collections since 1858, is on show at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence until 14 July.

Turn to page 50 to read more about the incredible mind of Leonardo da Vinci



MEDIEVAL EQUINE HISTORY

“Medieval aristocrats spent a huge amount of effort acquiring the beasts they would ride into battle”



A three-year collaborative project to examine the archaeology of medieval warhorses has been launched by the universities of Exeter and East Anglia. We asked the project team, led by **Oliver Creighton** (left), to explain more about these mighty animals

What is the purpose of the project?

Our aim is to carry out the first ever systematic archaeological study of warhorses from the late Anglo-Saxon period to the early Tudor era (c800–1550). We want to find out more about medieval horses and the cultures in which they were so important, and consider questions such as: “Did the Norman Conquest see the widespread introduction of new breeds of warhorse?”

What do we already know about warhorses in medieval society?

Medieval aristocrats spent a huge amount of time and effort acquiring the beasts that they would ride into battle, but while the history of warhorses has been intensively studied, the archaeological evidence is dispersed and sometimes forgotten, despite having potential to generate new information.

We'll be analysing the bones of horses from archaeological excavations, held by various museums and archives. We'll then turn our



attention to surviving horse apparel, such as harness pendants and bridle bits, as well as armour.

Finally, we will conduct the first coherent archaeological study of horse breeding landscapes, many of which were associated with deer parks. (During the 14th century, studs were documented in parks at Odiham in Hampshire, Rayleigh in Essex and Knaresborough in Yorkshire.) This will produce a new body of information about warhorses' development, training, appearance, and also their military and social roles.

How close was the relationship between horse and rider?

In the Middle Ages the horse was an unmistakable symbol of social status that was bound up closely with aristocratic, knightly and chivalric culture, as well as being a decisive weapon on the battlefield. The growing social distinction of the knight at the end of the 12th century was probably

accompanied by an increase in status of his warhorse. And it's worth remembering that the word ‘chivalry’ is derived from the French ‘chevalier’ (horseman).

We are surmising that some riders must have formed a close relationship with particular horses and hopefully the project can help to clarify these relationships. We do know the names of some horses from the period – Edward I had a horse called Greyley Lyndhurst – so it may be that we can track individual animals through documents as they move around the country.

How important is equine history?

When horses were first domesticated on the steppes of central Asia more than 5,000 years ago, it transformed human society; the world became a more interconnected place. In the Middle Ages, the horse still occupied an important place in society, not just because it was crucial to warfare, but also for traction and transport. The special status of the medieval horse is indicated by the fact that eating horsemeat was something of a taboo in Britain during this period. ■

Professor Oliver Creighton is principal investigator on the Warhorse: The Archaeology of a Military Revolution? project: medievalwarhorse.exeter.ac.uk/ @AHRC_Warhorse



A good month for... ENGINEERING

Margaret Partridge (above), an early pioneer of electrical engineering for women, is to be honoured with a blue plaque at her former home in Devon. Partridge, who died in 1967, set up her own electric power supply company after the First World War, bringing electricity to rural communities in Devon.

HERODOTUS

Historians may be forced to reassess Herodotus, following the discovery of a shipwreck in Thonis-Heracleion, Egypt. In the fifth century BC, the Greek historian described an unusual type of Nile river boat, known as a 'Baris', but his claims were dismissed due to a lack of evidence. The new find appears to prove him right.

A bad month for...



CADBURY

A Cadbury advertising campaign urging children to "grab a metal detector" and dig up treasure was withdrawn after being criticised by archaeologists. Digging without permission can be a criminal offence.

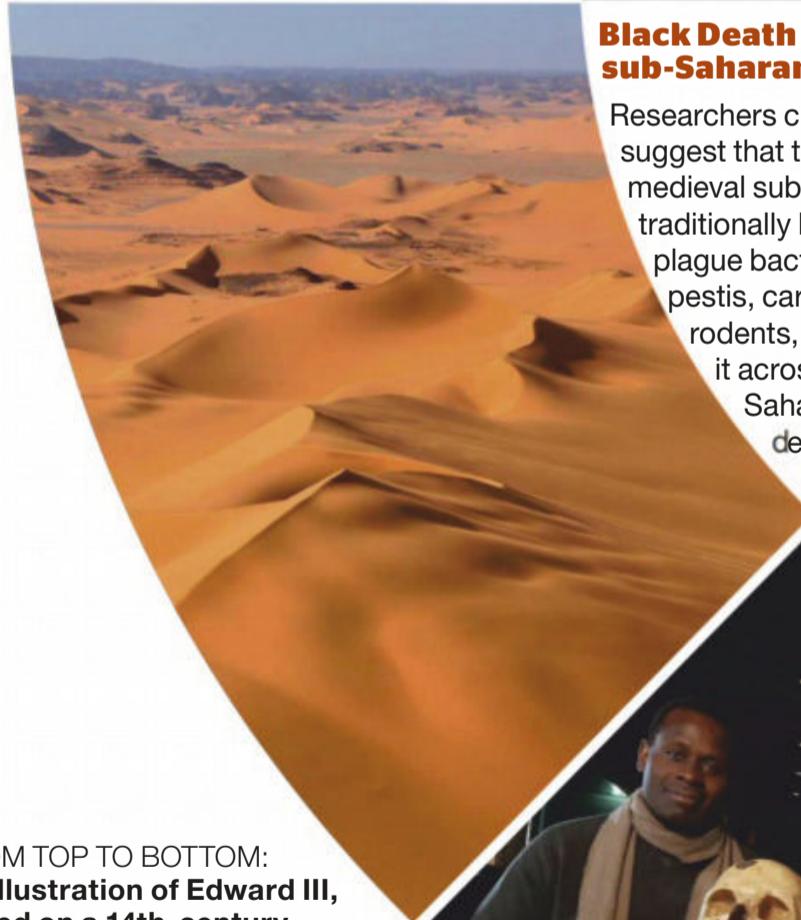
HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of stories hitting the history headlines



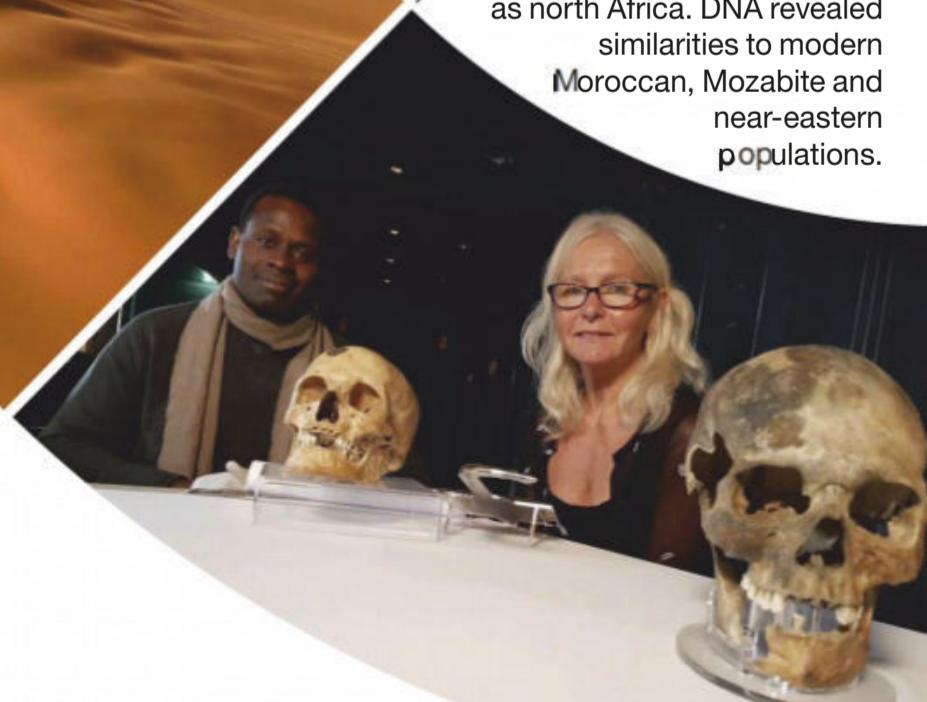
Traces of Nazi massacre found in Germany

Around 400 artefacts, including shoes, buttons, bullets and Soviet coins, have been unearthed in the Westphalia-Lippe region of Germany. The objects belonged to 208 Polish and Russian forced labourers who were murdered by the Nazis over the course of a few days in March 1945.



Black Death may have reached sub-Saharan Africa

Researchers claim they have evidence to suggest that the Black Death reached medieval sub-Saharan Africa. It's traditionally been believed that the plague bacterium, Yersinia pestis, carried by fleas on rodents, didn't make it across the Sahara desert.



Diversity in Mary Rose crew

Bone analysis of the crew of Tudor warship Mary Rose suggests that at least two men may have had heritage from as far afield as north Africa. DNA revealed similarities to modern Moroccan, Mozabite and near-eastern populations.

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:
An illustration of Edward III, based on a 14th-century engraving; a selection of objects found at the site of the Nazi massacre in the Westphalia-Lippe region of Germany; the Sahara desert; Historian Onyeka Nubia and researcher Alex Hildred with the skulls of two crew members of the *Mary Rose*

Edward III marriage contract auctioned

The marriage contract between the future Edward III and 11-year-old Philippa of Hainault has sold for £150,062 at auction. The contract, dated 27 August 1326, contains a promise by Edward to wed Philippa within two years of its being drawn up.

The pair married in January 1328.

The historians' view...

Why can't Kashmir escape its bloody past?

As violence continues to wrack the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, two historians consider why this former princely state has been at the centre of disputes between India and Pakistan for the past seven decades

Compiled by **Chris Bowlby**, a BBC journalist specialising in history

“The 1947–48 war in Kashmir meant that India and Pakistan were propelled onto a war-footing almost as soon as they were created

PROFESSOR SARAH ANSARI

The unrest currently convulsing Jammu and Kashmir is a legacy of the partition of British India in 1947.

In the countdown to 1947, plans for the partial transfer of power from British to Indian hands initially assumed that Indian princely states – of which Jammu and Kashmir was one – would join an all-India federation that included former British-controlled provinces.

But after the Second World War, the decision was taken to grant independence rapidly and create two separate states, India and Pakistan, by 1947. Princely states would have the right to remain independent or accede to one of the two new dominions.

Problems arose, however, when ruler and

subjects disagreed. Jammu and Kashmir's ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, was a Hindu, but the state – which sat directly between India and Pakistan – possessed a Muslim majority. The maharaja initially chose to remain independent, but uprisings combined with tribal military-backed incursions from the Pakistani side of the new border, led him to request intervention from the authorities in Delhi. In return, he signed the 'Instrument of Accession' to join India.

Later, the western portions of the maharaja's territory came under Pakistani control. The ceasefire line – which was subsequently renamed the 'Line of Control' – now demarcates the de facto c460 mile border between Indian and Pakistani-controlled territory.

The unresolved dispute over Kashmir has contributed directly to the failure of India and Pakistan to live side-by-side peacefully. A military conflict centring on the territory in 1947–48 meant that the two new states were propelled onto a war-footing almost as soon as they were created. There have been more wars in 1965, 1971 and 1999, frequent border clashes, and a continuing anti-state armed conflict in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir State (JKS).

In Pakistan, anxiety revolving around the perceived threat from India spawned an immediate but sustained security imperative. An enormous proportion of Pakistani spending went into building up its military



strength in the years that immediately followed partition. Pakistan has 650,000 active military personnel while India has built up armed forces currently 1.39 million-strong. Both states have nuclear weapons, simultaneously reflecting and contributing to regional insecurity.

In many ways, the Kashmir dispute has become gridlocked due to what many living in the region regard as the irreconcilable demands and ambitions involved. India considers JKS to be a legal part of the Indian Union. For Pakistan, the 'logic' of partition and its own creation as a separate homeland for Muslims, means that many Pakistanis believe Kashmir should have been integrated within their state at independence. Local people remain divided, though many do not want to be governed by India or Pakistan, preferring to be autonomous.

Arguably, for this impasse to end, all sides will need to compromise. But this will only happen if and when India and Pakistan improve bilateral relations, and governments no longer deploy the Kashmir issue as a political tool closer to home. In many ways, belligerence has become wired into

south Asia's DNA since independence.



Sarah Ansari is a professor of history at Royal Holloway, University of London



Women vent their fury during the funeral of a suspected militant reportedly killed during a gunfight with Indian troops in south Kashmir, March 2019

“The greatest tragedy is that Kashmiris are not just victims of this violence, but have also been forced to participate in it”

PROF CHITRALEKHA ZUTSHI

The region of Kashmir has historically either been a small kingdom with big ambitions or a part of a series of larger empires. The Kashmir Valley – 85 miles long and 25 miles wide – has long been its political, economic and cultural heart.

After being part of the Mughal empire, the Afghan empire and the Sikh Kingdom, the Kashmir Valley became one of the provinces of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) within the British Indian empire. Cobbled together by the British East India Company and including the provinces of Jammu, Ladakh, Gilgit and Baltistan, J&K was an unusually large and heterogeneous state. Kashmiris, Dogras, Punjabis, Baltis, Paharis and Gujjars, among many other groups, called it home.

Jammu and Kashmir had an overall

Muslim majority, but its Muslim population did not necessarily speak with one voice – a fact reflected in the multiple movements against autocracy raging in the state in the 1930s and 1940s. Although all were led by Muslims, they had different objectives.

Matters were brought to a head by the outbreak of an all-out revolt against J&K's Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, in the district of Poonch and then the Gilgit region, in October–November 1947. The Jammu & Kashmir Muslim Conference took control of the Poonch revolt and declared an Azad (independent) Kashmir, calling for its incorporation into Pakistan. This was followed by the entry of armed Pashtuns from Pakistan into Jammu and Kashmir with the aim of helping the Poonch rebels take control of the entire state.

The maharaja now acceded to India, and the Indian army entered the state to fight the raiders back. Another movement, led by the Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (which had sympathies with India and opposed forcible incorporation into Pakistan), supported the accession to India.

As India and Pakistan fought their first war over the state, and the United Nations brokered a ceasefire dividing it between them, Kashmir became a bilateral dispute between the two countries. More importantly, it was cast as a religious conflict between Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. The struggles of the



Hari Singh, the Hindu maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, found himself at odds with many of his Muslim subjects in 1947



Pashtun tribesmen pictured in December 1947 when they prosecuted a campaign to seize Jammu and Kashmir for Pakistan

people who had led movements against autocracy, and agitated for greater political and economic rights, were quickly forgotten or appropriated into the narrative of this larger dispute.

There have been multiple attempts at brokering peace between India and Pakistan over the last seven decades, but these have failed for a couple of reasons. First, the irreconcilable stances of both countries on Kashmir have rendered it into a zero-sum game; and second, these attempts have not included the multiple groups of people on the ground who have their own demands and grievances. As a result, violence, either exercised directly by the military, or through proxies, has become the means to keep Kashmir quiescent. The greatest tragedy of Kashmir is that the people of the region are not just victims of this violence, but have also been forced to participate in it.



Chitralekha Zutshi is a professor of history at the College of William & Mary in Virginia

DISCOVER MORE

BOOK

► **Kashmir: History, Politics, Representation** edited by Chitralekha Zutshi (Cambridge University Press, 2018)

PAST NOTES

PASSPORTS

OLD NEWS

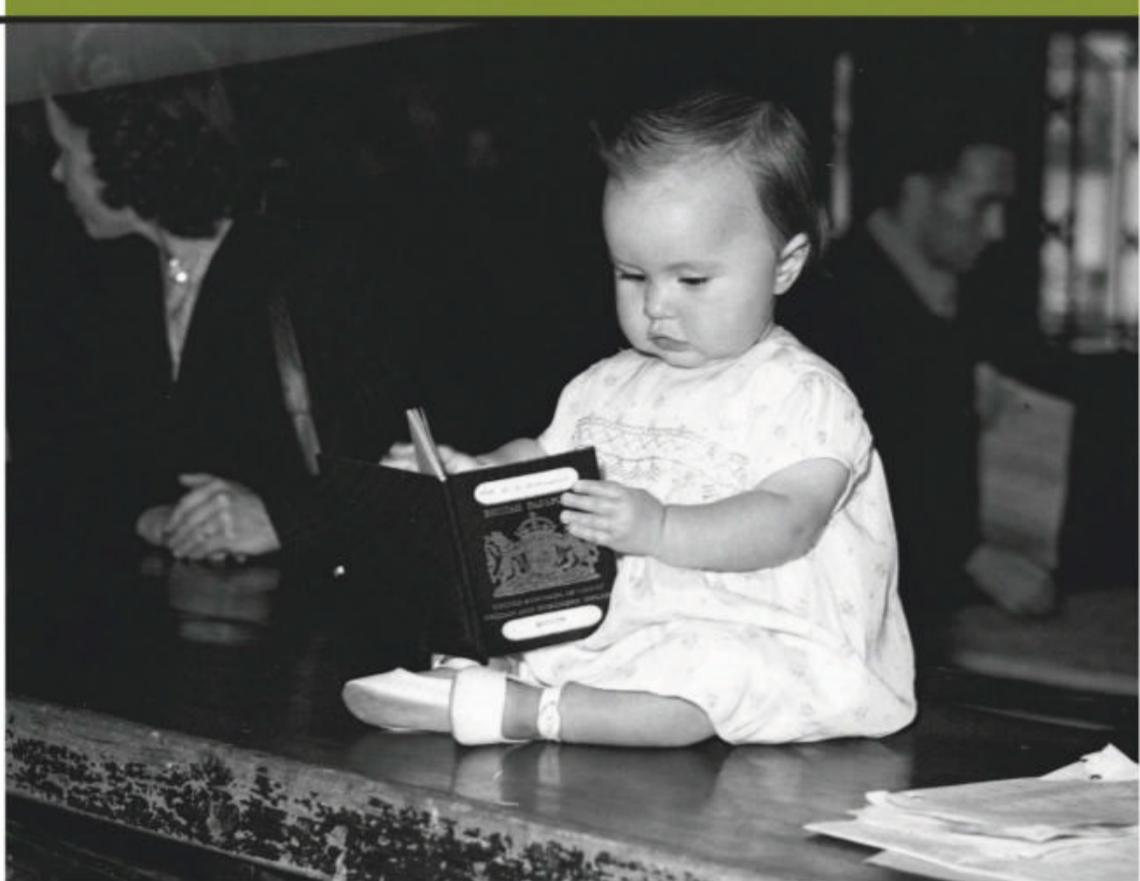
Turkey thieves hunted down

Chelmsford Chronicle
31 October 1941

George Moore and Albert Edward Chambers planned to steal some turkeys from Vaulty Manor Farm, Goldhanger. They would have got away and kept the birds for Christmas dinner but for Miss Pamela Speakman. Miss Pam, as she was known, worked on her family's turkey farm.

One day a young tractor driver approached her house at great speed, crying: "Miss Pam, Miss Pam, there are two men after your turkeys." Seeing them in the distance, sacks slung over their shoulders, she immediately gave chase. "I can run pretty fast," she told Essex journalist Junella Chapelle, who reported Miss Pam ran so quickly that the men hopped over a hedge and tried to hide. Chasing them for five fields, Miss Pam captured one man with the help of a neighbouring farmer. Having deposited him at the local police station, she took a car and set off down the lanes to find his criminal companion. A local land girl told her she had seen a man, matching the description of the remaining fugitive, making his way towards Maldon. Offering him a lift, Miss Pam drove the remaining offender straight to the police station – two birds caught with one stone!

Story sourced from [britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) and rediscovered by **Fern Riddell**. Fern regularly appears on BBC Radio 3's *Free Thinking*



A baby waits, passport in hand, for her trip to a new life in Australia, 1947

From letters issued by biblical kings to today's 34-page booklet, **Julian Humphrys** looks at the rise of the passport

When did people first start travelling with passports?

The first mention of anything resembling a passport is in the Bible. The Book of Nehemiah relates that (in about 450 BC) Artaxerxes of Persia issued Nehemiah with letters requesting that the governors of the lands beyond the Euphrates allow him to travel safely to Judah.

How about British passports?

The earliest English reference to one of these 'safe conduct' documents can be found in the 13th century when a number were issued to Portuguese merchants. Such documents could be issued by the king to anyone, English or not. By the 16th century the Privy Council was issuing them, and it was at this time that the word 'passport' was first used. Passports were written in Latin and English until the 1770s, when French, the diplomatic language of the time, was used instead. This continued until 1858 when the British passport, at that time a single sheet of paper, became a standardised document issued solely to British nationals.

Passports only became essential for foreign travel at the time of the

First World War, and the first 'modern' British passport dates from that period. A single sheet folded into eight, it had a cardboard cover, included a description and photograph of the bearer, and was valid for two years.

What's the story behind the 'classic' blue British passport?

It was imposed on us from abroad! In 1920 a League of Nations conference held in Paris came up with a set of standards that passports would have to meet to secure international recognition. These stated that the passport should be a 32-page booklet and specified the information it had to contain.

Why did Britain switch to a burgundy coloured passport?

We chose to. In 1988 the European Economic Community produced a common passport format, which member states decided to adopt for the sake of convenience. Although all the member states (except Croatia, which has a blue passport) would eventually choose various shades of burgundy for the cover, there was, and still is, no stipulation over what colour it should be. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN JONES





Michael Wood on... **the high street**

"This story opens a window on how society and class work"

“Historians should always particularise: so said the great landscape historian Bill Hoskins. Tell the story of Britain through one place, and the particularity can be riveting. Even the tale of a single house and who lived in it can be revealing. And the same goes for a street. As Hannah Barker shows in her fascinating recent book *Family and Business During the Industrial Revolution*, the mundane story of the high street is a fascinating subject.

Close to where I live today in north London is Englands Lane, a name ripe for metaphor. Walk down it and you see how every street is a barometer of our social history. It was built in 1865, with a few well-to-do villas, one later the home of Arthur Rackham, the illustrator of Peter Pan; but really it was just a row of shops to service the big houses on the hill, with a pub at the end.

The 1886 local directory gives us a portrait of this particular London ‘village’. Still quite rural, it had a dairy where cows came up from Chalk Farm to be milked. There was a poulterer, a fruiterer, grocers, butchers, a fishmonger and a milliner; two bakeries, a saddler, Victoria Wine and Spirits; two stationers, an oilman and a corn merchant; a servants’ hiring registry; St Mary’s Convent Young Lady’s school and Allchin Dispensing Chemists, whose fine Victorian shopfront survives today. At the end of the lane was the Washington pub with its lovely glass and mahogany interior.

In 1926, Kelly’s Directory still lists that world. Allchin and the dairy are there, the butchers and grocers too – but now it’s slightly more upmarket: bootmakers and upholsterers, a general store, two wine shops. Yet there’s still an urban garden feel.

All that changed in the 1970s with the influx of people from the Indian subcontinent. There was Mr Mistry’s England’s Papers, and Raj’s Stationers, which sold everything for school: protractors and set squares, pens, pencils and compasses and every kind of coloured paper and card. There was Curry Manjil, and RKP Hardware – an Aladdin’s cave run by two jovial Gujarati brothers.

A mysterious man called Chandu had a cavernous shop selling Indian textiles, hammocks, and shawls, joss sticks and bottles of dazzling holi powder, straight from the streets of Benares. The Moore sisters (whose family had been in the street for 100 years) sold gifts, cowboy hats and Chinese bric a brac. Next door was Ken Paul’s magical junk shop with a huge wooden monkey at the door. All in all, it made the street feel slightly alternative. When one neighbour arrived in 1974 she was asked by her landlord: “Are you a Bohemian? Because we are all a bit Bohemian around here!”

But times change. The next phase began 20 years ago. Starbucks moved in, and the first bath showroom and health and beauty salons. Tesco took over the grocers. The lane was being gentrified. Sting moved into Rackham’s house and Tears for Fears into the big villa with the glass roof studio. In 2002 the Fine Arts College founded by Nicholas Cochrane and Candida Cave in Tottenham Court Road YMCA moved into the old dairy. Their students gave the daytime atmosphere a real boost of youthful energy, and led to a huge increase in nice lunchtime cafes.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the lane, in 2004 the big red brick block, a nurses’ residence for the Royal Free Hospital, turned into a hostel for 150 homeless families, among them refugees from Somalia and Syria. But the gentrification of the shops continued. Chandu was the first to go as rents went up. Raj’s newspaper shop was next. Then RKP, the best DIY shop in north London. By 2010 the change was there for all to see along the lane: a service world of estate agents and cafes, health shops, and kitchen design firms had taken over.

To the historian, whether of the industrial revolution or Brexit Britain, the story of the shopping street opens a window on how society and class work. “It was the last hurrah for the London row of shops,” Joseph Connolly said of his 2012 novel *England’s Lane*. “Since then, not only have our shops changed, we’ve changed.”

We certainly have. ■

Michael Wood
is professor of
public history
at the University
of Manchester.
He has presented
numerous BBC
documentaries
and series,
including *The Story
of China* in 2016

BBC



LETTERS

Easter horror

It was interesting reading the *History Explorer* piece on the persecution of Jews in medieval England (April) and the suicide of a Jewish community in York during Easter 1190. Another massacre that occurred that Easter took place in Bury St Edmunds, where 57 Jews died at the hands of townspeople, supposedly in revenge for the crucifixion a few years earlier of a boy later celebrated as Saint Robert.

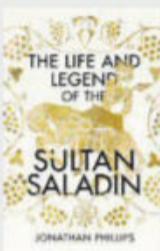
The Jews had fled from Heathenmen's Street to seek sanctuary at the great Benedictine Abbey of St Edmund, but Abbot Samson shut the gates on them, allowing the townspeople to commit mass murder. Samson, although a charismatic abbot, may have had an ulterior motive to dispose of these people because his

predecessor, Abbot Hugh, had borrowed from Jewish money-lenders. What better way to get rid of a debt than to remove those to whom you owe it? Samson commented of the Jews that: "They were not St Edmunds men." Incidentally, 2020 sees the millennium of the founding, by King Cnut, of the abbey in Bury St Edmunds.

Martyn Taylor, Bury St Edmunds

LETTER
OF THE
MONTH

● We reward the Letter of the Month writer with our book of the month. In this issue that is *The Life and Legend of Sultan Saladin* by Jonathan Phillips. Read the review on page 71



The remains of the abbey in Bury St Edmunds, a holy site where 57 Jews were refused sanctuary in 1190 – an exclusion that led to their deaths



A great risk

Guy Walters suggests that the time has come for reappraisal of the Great Escape (*The Not-So Great Escape*, April). In fact, this was done as early as 1953 by none other than Pat Reid, the British escape officer at Colditz until his own successful escape in 1942. In his book, *The Latter Days at Colditz*, Reid describes the Great Escape as a disaster, not least because of the 50 fatalities.

Reid suggests that the prisoners would have done better to have restricted the escapees to 10. Had they done this, with the preparation that was made, perhaps six might have successfully escaped, because a smaller number would not have led to a mass hue and cry. He does concede that if 10 had got out and been

captured, then feelings in the camp might have been different. Reid's final point is that the mass breakout was the popular choice, but not necessarily the wise one.

George Tranter, Bangor-on-Dee

Contested history

Your letter of the month for April on Battle of Britain myths makes some statements that are factually incorrect. Far from enjoying a major numerical advantage in crucial fighter aircraft, the Royal Air Force limped back from the battle for France with about half those of the Luftwaffe.

These were largely Spitfires and Hurricanes. The Hurricane was slower than its German counterpart, the

Messerschmitt Bf109, and the Spitfire marginally faster. Despite this, it was the Hurricanes, which the RAF possessed in larger numbers, that carried the greater part of the battle to the Germans.

Turning to the idea the RAF had a superior numbers of pilots: by late August 1940, although Beaverbrook's production reforms had just about coped with the loss of planes, the RAF had a desperate shortage of pilots. Although pilots were recruited from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, the West Indies and occupied Europe, until the Germans switched tactics and began bombing London, the RAF's survival was touch and go.

On one point, the letter writer appears to be correct. Göring and his staff advised against switching the main focus of the Luftwaffe attack from British airfields and aircraft factories to London, but they were overridden by a delusional Hitler.

There is nothing wrong with debunking, but this carries with it the responsibility to be accurate. The letter also runs the risk of belittling the bravery of the outnumbered pilots who took on often more experienced Germans in dogfights for three months when the future of this country hung in the balance.

Murray Rowlands, Surrey

A royal murder?

I enjoyed Lauren Johnson's article on Henry VI, *Nice Guy, Terrible King*, (March), but was concerned by the statement that Henry was murdered on the order of Edward IV. While it is very possible that this was the case, there is no definitive confirmation of this.

Early sources are not specific about the murderer's identity. The official *Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV*, pro-Yorkist of course, states that Henry died of "melancholy" on hearing news of the battle of Tewkesbury and his son's death. The exhumation of Henry's body in 1910, however, concluded that his death had been a violent one. Philippe de Commynes, writing c1490, claims Richard (the future king) was the perpetrator, as does Sir Thomas More in his *History of Richard III* (written between 1513 and 1518). So while it is likely that Edward ordered the assassina-



Steve McQueen as 'Cooler King' Virgil Hilts. Reader George Tranter points out that ex-PoW Pat Reid questioned the wisdom of the Great Escape back in 1953

tion, there is no explicit evidence in support of the theory.

Jo Wilkins, Nottingham

Lauren Johnson responds: Based on the evidence available, I am convinced Henry was murdered, and under the circumstances of 1471 the order to do so must have come from Edward IV. Belief in Henry's murder was widespread within years of his death (as the closely contemporary *Crowland* and *Warkworth Chronicles* suggest) and you could even visit the dagger with which the crime was allegedly committed, at the Lady Chapel in Caversham.

The report of the 1910 exhumation was unfortunately flawed and did not definitively settle Henry's cause of death. It was reported that Henry's skull was damaged – as were most of the remaining bones, they had been moved in 1484 – and there was dark liquid on his head which may have been blood, but since it was not tested it could equally have been naturally occurring post-mortem corpse wax. The anatominist who was present felt the evidence was insufficient to settle the question.

Brexit's past

Efforts to compare Brexit with previous apparently similar events (*Brexit: Lessons from History*, April) fail to take into account historical trends that have taken Britain on a very different path to the nations of the continent. Since we broke

away from political and religious European domination, the emigration of large numbers of our people to other parts of the world, together with the export of our ideas and culture, have led to the creation both of the Anglosphere and the now rapidly developing Commonwealth. We have outgrown the limits of Europe, and look across the oceans, not the Channel.

Joining the EU was an aberration and one that was bound to end in a divorce.

Colin Bullen, Kent

Destination clarified

In your March edition, the article on *The Real Faces of the Victorian Underworld* contains an image of convicts being transported to "Botany Bay" in the 19th century. While the term "Botany Bay" may have been used to denote anywhere in Australia, after the First Fleet no convicts landed at Botany Bay. By the time the drawing depicts, convicts going to New South Wales were landing at Sydney Cove, where Sydney now stands.

Ed Soja, New Zealand

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SOCIAL MEDIA

What you've been saying on Twitter and Facebook



As a culture, do we focus too much on monarchs and leaders, over 'ordinary' lives?

@AlisonRBaxter Family historians are researching ordinary lives all the time. And they often turn out to be extraordinary!

@kesiatk Probably in the media, yes. But most historians I know aren't actually doing this anymore. And, if you look at the large number of living history sites in the UK and North America, you'll notice a lot of people presenting and consuming the history of 'ordinary' lives.

@NavalAirHistory Yes, definitely. I wonder if there's also an argument that when we do consider 'great men' (ugh) we look more at the effect of their actions on 'ordinary' people?

@RobeH2 There's room for both. The trouble with cutting out monarchs and 'great men' etc is that they often did drive the events of their eras. Removing William the Conqueror from histories of the Norman conquest isn't really going to fly.

@BenjaminDonks4 If we knew the personal interesting lifelong details of ordinary people I'd be really interested. But I think that's rare. Attempts to discuss ordinary people are often cliched political screeds - duller than ditchwater.

@MalvernMe Not currently. The trend right now is to focus on social history. All of it is interesting. What frequently seems left out is economic, technological and geographic history.

@hisdoryan Definitely! I can see why – there is more source material available for these people and in terms of influence and potential to change the course of history these people had it by the bucketloads! Doesn't mean it's right though.

@ferryhill19 Surely it's because history is only focused on monarchs and leaders that we keep repeating the same mistakes. To paraphrase somebody or other, "History is written by the winners."

A bloody business

Seeking to remove opponents who questioned his right to be head of church and state, Henry VIII was ruthless in his pursuit of those he deemed traitors



HENRY'S ENEMIES

Bribery, subterfuge, kidnap
and murder by paid assassins.

As **Robert Hutchinson** reveals,
when it came to neutralising enemies
of the English state - even those living
abroad - Henry VIII would stop
at absolutely nothing

Cardinal David Beaton made a lot of enemies during his short career as lord chancellor of Scotland. Serving from 1543–46, the fiercely Catholic Beaton first enraged Scotland's Protestants by arresting a friar called John Rogers for preaching heretical doctrine, and throwing Rogers into a dungeon at St Andrews Castle, his seat of power. Beaton then incurred the wrath of the influential reformist, John Knox, by having George Wishart, a Protestant preacher and Knox's mentor, burned at the stake.

But of all the foes that Beaton made in the 1540s, none was more powerful than King Henry VIII. Beaton had been one of the most vigorous opponents of Henry's attempts to impose greater English influence on Scotland, and he had helped the papal ambassador Mark Grimani evade a kidnap attempt by the king's agents while sailing to Scotland. But, in the spring of 1546 Beaton's defiance of the English monarch would have bloody consequences. At daybreak on 29 May, 17 assassins, secretly funded by Henry, broke into St Andrews Castle hellbent on teaching Beaton a lesson. First they murdered the castle's porter, hurling his bloodied body into a ditch. Then they fell on

the cardinal himself, dragging him from his bedchamber and hacking him to death. Soon after, Cardinal Beaton's mutilated corpse could be seen dangling from a window by sheets tied to an arm and a foot. This was a humiliating fate for one of Scotland's most powerful men. Henry insisted that his involvement be kept secret because he maintained, with sublime hypocrisy, that "such business is not meet for kings".

Beaton wasn't the first nor the last victim of Henry's relentless pursuit of those he deemed to be traitors and enemies – a pursuit that stemmed both from religious turmoil and the Tudors' tenuous, if not legally fragile, right to the throne. In the 1530s, Henry extended treason laws to penalise those

uttering disloyal words, or opposing the king's religious supremacy, his choice of wives, or the status of his wives and any royal offspring. Hundreds would die as a result.

Throughout the rest of his reign, Henry showed scant respect for tiresome diplomatic protocol or kingly comportment when it came to neutralising threats to his crown or ambitions. It's this that explains his little-known enthusiasm for conspiracy and clandestine operations.

Henry was probably involved in an audacious plot to kidnap his nephew, James V of Scotland (1512–42), on Scottish soil and carry him off to London. Meanwhile, the brutal death of Cardinal Beaton confirmed the English king's capability to orchestrate assassinations north of the border. But Henry's shadowy war with men he deemed enemies of the state wasn't confined to Scotland. He arguably went to even greater lengths to eliminate his foes on mainland Europe.

The royal hitlist

The king's chief target was Cardinal Reginald Pole (see boxout below), a theologian who actively sought England's return to papal authority following the break with Rome. As the king's bête noire, an "arch traitor", as Henry called him, Pole escaped numerous attempts by English agents to kidnap or kill him. But Pole was far from alone. In total, around 130 clergy or laymen with traditional religious beliefs fled England between 1533 and 1546 as the English Reformation gathered momentum. Henry feared that "such men would have the opportunity to work their treason" overseas, and so he dispatched agents to hunt them down.

This meant that men such as Robert Brancetour – an associate of Pole, reported "now in Italy, devising the king's destruction [and persuading] princes to levy war against the king" – had to be constantly watchful. In December 1539, one of Henry's diplomats, Sir Thomas Wyatt, learnt that Brancetour was in Paris as part of the entourage of Charles V of Spain, who was on a state visit to France. Wyatt asked the French king, Francis I, to sanction Brancetour's extradition. Brancetour was, in Wyatt's words, "a man of small quality who had been a merchant's factor and robbed his master and since... had conspired against [Henry]. There was no one that bore more malice to [the king] than he." Francis acquiesced, ordering his provost to accompany Wyatt during the arrest.

They went "without light" to Brancetour's lodgings. While trying to gain entry, Wyatt fell, badly hurting his leg. His sudden entrance, like a pantomime villain, stunned Brancetour. "His colour changed as soon as

Cardinal Beaton's mutilated corpse was dangled from a window, a brutal and humiliating fate

HENRY'S MOST WANTED

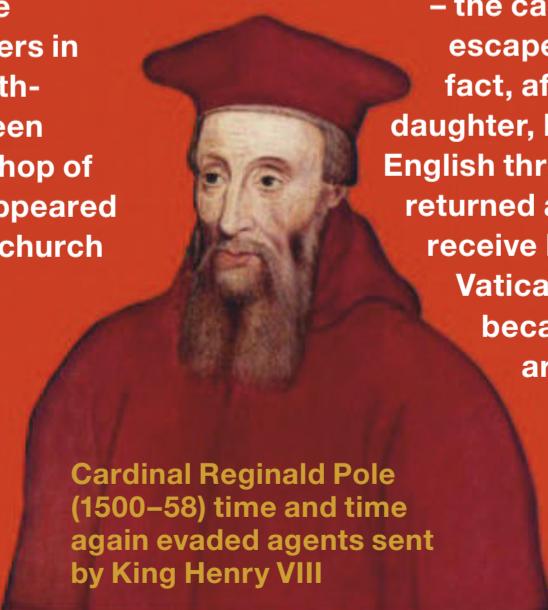
REGINALD POLE

HATED ENEMY OF THE STATE

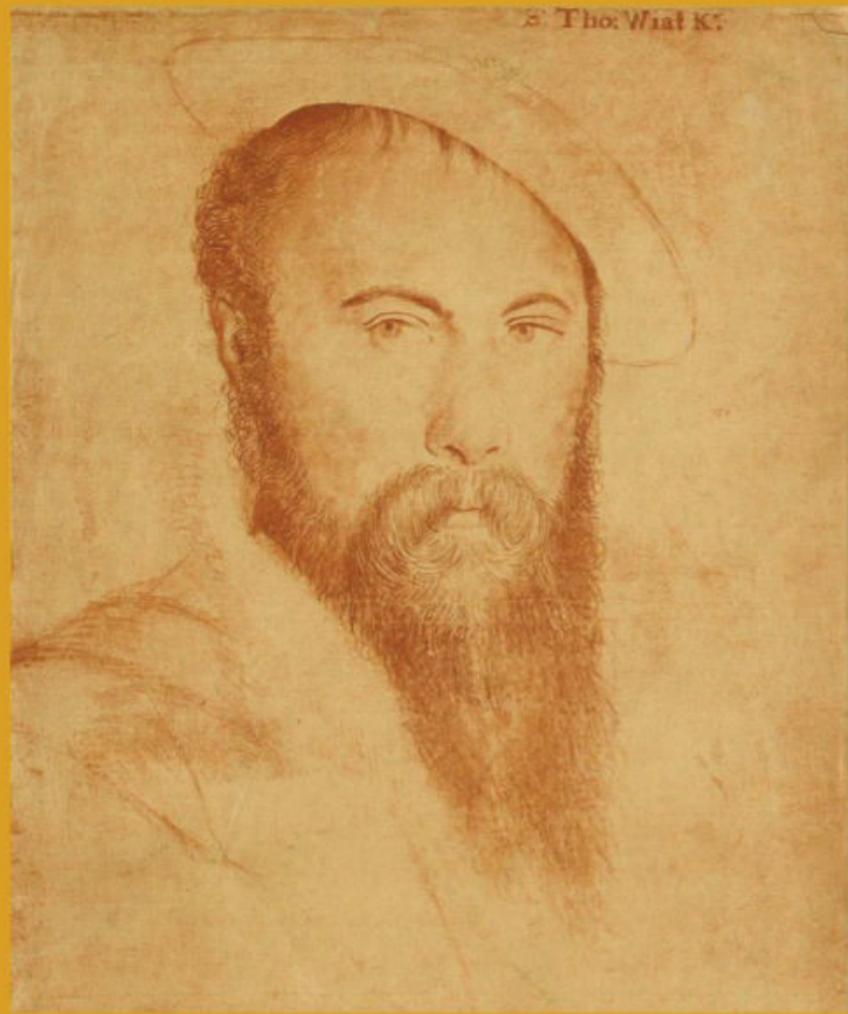
Henry's chief target was undoubtedly Cardinal Reginald Pole. Pole was the third son of Sir Richard Pole (1458/59–1505) and Margaret, Countess of Salisbury (born 1473), who was beheaded for treason in 1541. Pole warned Henry of the dangers in divorcing his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. He had been tipped as the next archbishop of York, but preferment disappeared like incense in a draughty church because of this stance.

Pole enraged Henry further by writing *Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione* ('*Defence of the Unity of the Church*'), an attack on the king's decision to

declare himself head of the English church. Created cardinal in 1536, Pole embarked on a seditious mission in Europe, supporting rebellions against Henry in the north of England. Henry ordered his ambassadors to kidnap him. Thomas Cromwell sent a team into Flanders tasked with assassinating him. Despite this – and the 100,000 gold crowns (£10.4m today) reward that was put up for his capture "alive or dead" – the cardinal repeatedly escaped Henry's grasp. In fact, after Henry's Catholic daughter, Mary, ascended the English throne in 1553, Pole returned as papal legate to receive England back into the Vatican's fold. In 1556, he became the last Catholic archbishop of Canterbury and acted as the queen's chief minister. He died in the great influenza epidemic of 1558.



Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500–58) time and time again evaded agents sent by King Henry VIII



Henry's men In order to track down those he wanted to detain and even to execute, Henry VIII drew on the help of diplomats. These included Sir William Paget (left), who was appointed to the Privy Council in the 1540s, and would go on to serve both Edward VI and Mary I; and Sir Thomas Wyatt (right), who was also a poet, co-credited with introducing the sonnet to England from Italy

he heard my voice and the provost set hand upon him," Wyatt recalled. Wyatt tried to snatch letters from a table but "he flung them backwards into the fire. Yet I overthrew him and caught them out [of the flames]". Wyatt had ensnared his prey, although not for long. Brancetour insisted he was Charles V's servant and he demanded that the provost deliver him to the Spanish king. The French official, finding himself in deep diplomatic waters, departed to seek fresh instructions.

Meanwhile, Charles V prevaricated over agreeing to extradite Brancetour, saying he would consider whether any treaties applied in this case after he returned to Spain. "I tell you plain, I will speak for his deliverance both to the constable of France and to the [French] king and I trust they will not do me so great a dishonour as to allow one that serves me to suffer damage," the Spanish king told Wyatt. "Even if your master had me in the Tower of London, I would not consent to change my honour and my conscience." The next morning, the French freed Brancetour and he went to Rome to meet Pole.

Banged up abroad

If Henry's brother monarchs proved reluctant to repatriate those Henry believed to be

traitors, the fugitives themselves were just as slippery in escaping the king's grasp, as the case of Gregory Dudley, son of John Sutton, Lord Dudley showed. Disguised as a labourer, Gregory escaped from England to hide in English-held Calais. He later went to Paris, where another of Henry VIII's diplomats, Sir William Paget, found him in February 1543.

Paget obtained a blank warrant from the French for Dudley's extradition and kept "this miserable fool" in custody. Dudley obligingly scribbled a treason confession. "He begged for mercy with more tears than I ever saw distil from any creature's eyes," Paget reported. "If there be no greater malice in him than

Henry's brother monarchs proved reluctant to repatriate those seen by the king as traitors

HENRY'S MOST WANTED

DICK HOSIER

THE FAKE YORKIST PRETENDER

Little is known about the fugitive nicknamed 'Blanche Rose', who triggered a powerful dread in Henry VIII because of his claim to be a Yorkist pretender to the crown of England. In reality, Rose was Dick Hosier, born in Wales and the son of a cobbler or tailor. He fled to France for reasons now unclear, although Henry maintained he was a rebel, "a detestable traitor and common murderer".

After diplomatic pressure was applied, Hosier spent eight years in a Parisian gaol, but was later freed. Repeated efforts to extradite him failed, with the French maintaining he was a subject of Francis I. A final demand for the Blanche Rose's extradition appeared in Henry's ultimatum of demands made in June 1543 as a prelude to war with France. The demand was ignored and history does not record Hosier's fate.



A murderer looks on? *The Massacre of the Innocents* by Bonifacio de' Pitati (c1487–1553). In the bottom right of the painting, a man dressed in red looks on, apparently unconcerned at the horrors he's witnessing as the biblical king Herod has babies put to the sword. To his right is a servant, who carries a shield bearing the coat of arms of the da l'Armi family. It seems likely the artist, who worked in Venice, was referencing Colonel da l'Armi, a ruthless killer employed by Henry VIII, and a man who would be executed for his violence

appears, he might be pardoned.” But just nine days later, Dudley got away. Paget begged Henry’s pardon for the escape of “this false traitorous boy Dudley” who, while eating his supper, “whipped out at the door and was out of sight [in the street] before that beastly fool, his keeper, could open the door and follow”.

Two English agents, Edward Raleigh and John Brant, spotted the fugitive in Milan that April. Should they detain him, or just kill him on the spot? Murdering him could be “unprofitable” since they might lose vital intelligence won during interrogation. However, seeking his arrest would be “difficult in a free country where papists bear much rule”. The Milan governor agreed to hold Dudley but he slipped away once more, heading for the safety of papal territory. Fortunately for the duo, they tracked him down again and he was imprisoned. In August, though, Brant brought bad news: “That naughty person Dudley [was] suffered to escape out of Milan castle.”

Grim nonchalance

With traitors proving so infuriatingly elusive, more direct action was required. An unlikely instrument of the king’s vengeance came in the guise of a shadowy Italian mercenary, Colonel da l’Armi. Henry hired da l’Armi ostensibly to recruit mercenary soldiers. In reality his mission was to kill Henry’s hated enemy, Reginald Pole.

Da l’Armi arrived in Venice in January 1545, at the same time that the Venetian magistrates commissioned four paintings for their headquarters near the Rialto Bridge. One was *The Massacre of the Innocents*, portraying a massacre of infants perpetrated by King Herod’s soldiers. The picture includes a handsome bearded figure nonchalantly watching the carnage. A retainer, alongside, has a shield bearing the da l’Armi arms. So the bearded man must be Henry’s Italian hitman – and this painting could be described as the most expensive wanted poster in the history of criminology.

The Vatican’s intelligence network soon discovered da l’Armi’s presence in Venice and his true mission. Edmund Harvel, Henry’s ambassador in Venice, reported (wrongly, as it happens) that Pole had refused to attend the church’s council at Trento in north-east Italy, for “fear of his life” because “of such captains... [serving] your majesty”. William Paget chillingly described da l’Armi as having a “vengeful wit and naturally disposed to work mysteries. Such a man, at such a time, is to be cherished,” he said. The Catholic authorities doubtless saw matters differently, and hired a posse of 13 assassins to kill da l’Armi before he could get to Pole. The pre-emptive strike

HENRY’S MOST WANTED

GREGORY BOTOLF

THE SILVER-TONGUED PREACHER

Gregory Botolf, known as ‘Gregory Sweetlips’ for his preaching skills, was chaplain to Viscount Lisle, Calais governor, who plotted to capture the English stronghold and surrender it to Henry’s chief target, Cardinal Pole.

Henry offered Botolf the trap of a wealthy benefice (a church appointment) in Calais that required his “immediate repair thither”. The bait proved untempting. Botolf was later imprisoned at Diest (in modern-day Belgium) while diplomatic

efforts were made to extradite him but papal influence soon won his release. Botolf planned to free Margaret Pole, Cardinal Pole’s mother, who was held in the Tower of London for treason. The conspiracy came to nought and Sweetlips then disappears from the historical record.

However, two others innocently caught up in Botolf’s treason failed to escape Henry’s clutches. Edmund Brindholm, a Calais priest, and Clement Philpot, one of Lisle’s gentlemen, were executed at Tyburn on 4 August 1540 for allying themselves with “the king’s enemy, the bishop of Rome and assisting Raynold [sic] Pole, an abominable and arrogant traitor”.

Henry’s campaign to eliminate his enemies was audacious, sinister and brutal, yet ultimately it failed

failed and da l’Armi remained at large.

By May 1545, the 77-year-old pope, Paul III, was sufficiently concerned to tell Francesco Venier, Venetian envoy to the Vatican, that da l’Armi was planning a “terrible crime” and was awaiting a gentleman of Henry’s Privy Chamber to deliver instructions – expected within 12 days. The pope added: “We see this villain near at hand. He deserves a thousand deaths... The king of England... a heretic, is plotting mischief... The council is sitting [at Trento]. There is Cardinal Pole, whom these ruffians may have been ordered to kidnap, or take sinister action against him.”

If da l’Armi was attempting to evade his pursuers’ attentions by keeping a low profile, he failed miserably. In August 1545, he was involved in a fight with the Venetian night-watch that resulted in a watchman being seriously wounded – a crime punishable by death. Da l’Armi only avoided this fate when Harvel persuaded the Venetian authorities – keen to protect “valuable investments” held by Venetian merchants in England – to back off. Then it was discovered that da l’Armi had hired thugs to murder a mercenary officer, Count Curio Bua, in Treviso. They stabbed and slashed at him two or three times, which he survived, before riding off.

In November 1546, the Italian merchant banker Mafio Bernardo was stabbed 18 times and murdered. A letter was found in Bernardo’s bloodstained doublet, a letter da l’Armi had given to the killers, men he called his “intimate comrades”. Henry’s assassin had thus far maimed and murdered with impunity. But his luck was about to run out. Da l’Armi quit Venice again and, in January 1547, attended a glittering entertainment in Milan. Despite wearing a mask, he was recognised and detained. The Venetians had their man. But would realpolitik prevent the Venetians from prosecuting da l’Armi? Henry’s death in January 1547 provided the answer. Fears that Henry would scrap his alliance with the city state if it mistreated da l’Armi died with the English king – and so, in May 1547, da l’Armi was escorted to Venice’s Piazzo San Marco and beheaded.

This swaggering cutthroat’s career very much reflected Henry VIII’s campaign to eliminate his enemies in Europe. It was audacious, sinister and brutal, yet ultimately it failed. Cardinal Reginald Pole – the “arch traitor” so loathed by Henry – would live to fight another day. ■

Robert Hutchinson is a historian. His new book, *Henry VIII: The Decline and Fall of a Tyrant*, was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in April

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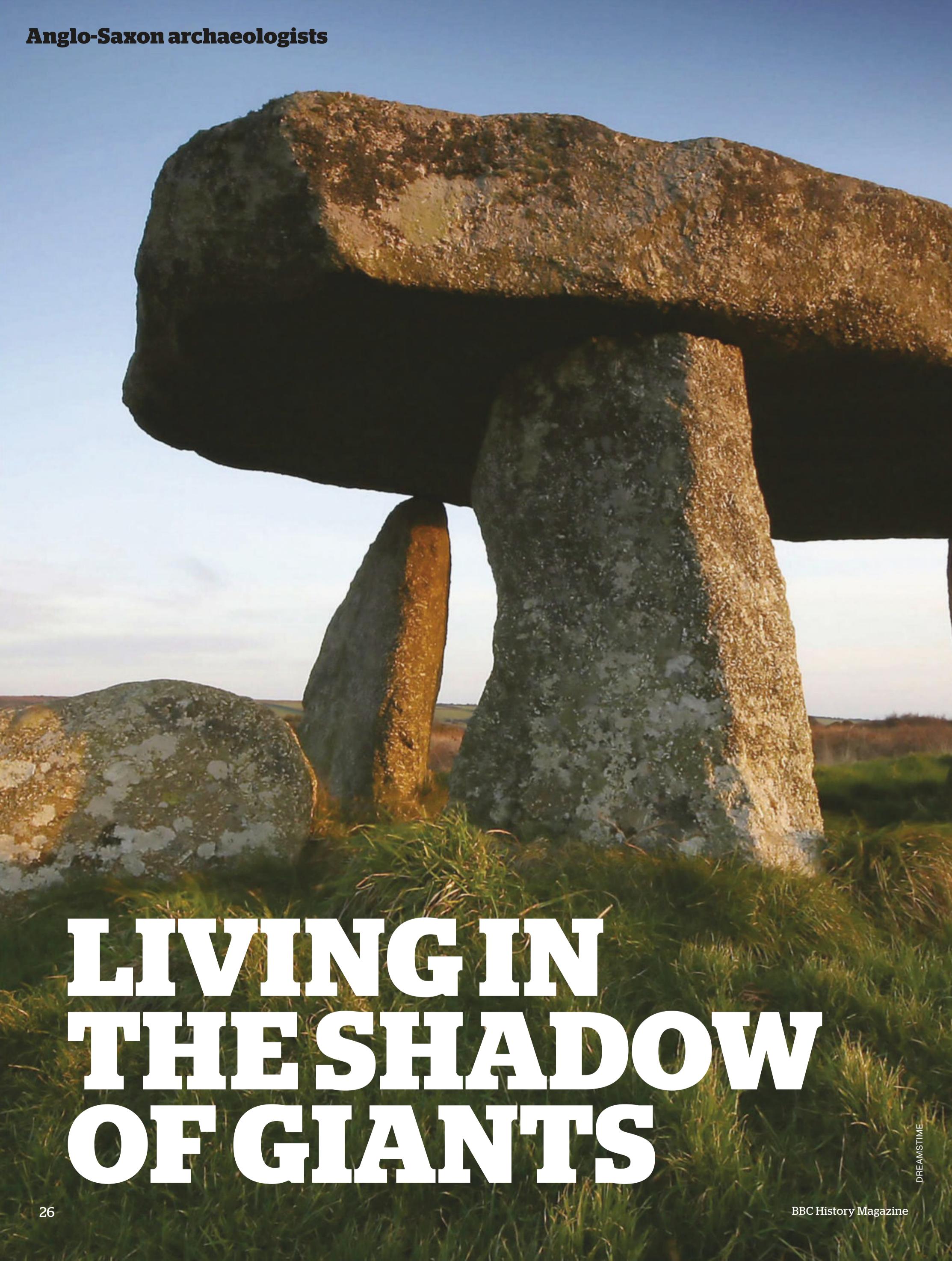
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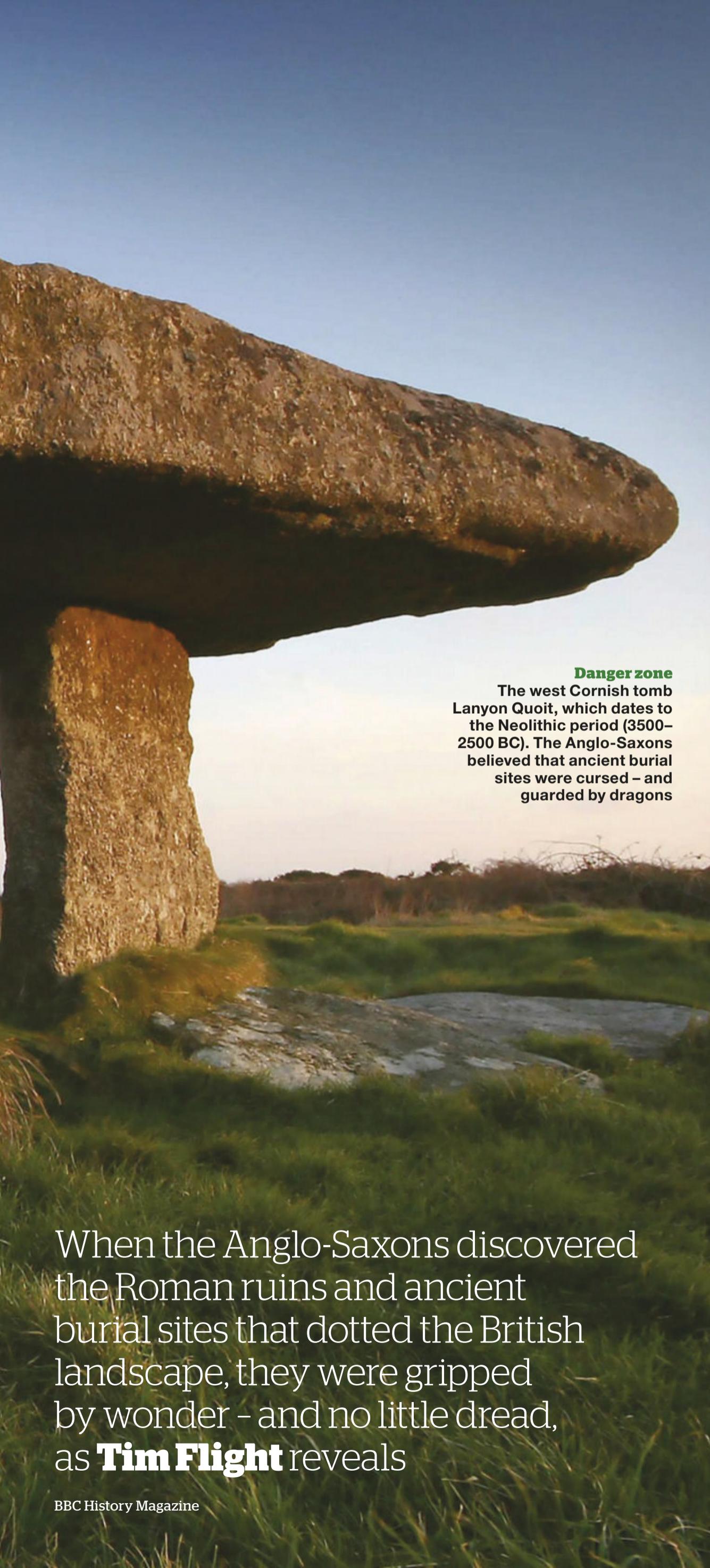
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Anglo-Saxon archaeologists



LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF GIANTS

DREAMTIME



When the Anglo-Saxons discovered the Roman ruins and ancient burial sites that dotted the British landscape, they were gripped by wonder – and no little dread, as **Tim Flight** reveals

Danger zone
The west Cornish tomb Lanyon Quoit, which dates to the Neolithic period (3500–2500 BC). The Anglo-Saxons believed that ancient burial sites were cursed – and guarded by dragons

The long, hot summer of 2018 proved an unexpected boon to archaeologists by scorching away the grass to reveal long-forgotten monuments dotted across the British landscape. We in the 21st century know more than ever about the past. But that didn't stop these new discoveries reinventing the landscape with a sense of wonder.

But how would our ancestors have reacted to the same phenomenon? An Old English poem might have left us a clue. Dating from somewhere between the eighth and tenth centuries, *Guthlac A* tells the story of Saint Guthlac, a former soldier who became a hermit in the Lincolnshire Fens.

The poem tells us that, while Guthlac was attempting to find a hermitage, a burial mound of indeterminate antiquity was suddenly revealed to him. "That place in the land had been hidden from the eyes of men until the Creator revealed a barrow in the woods," we're told. On the face of it, this is a description of God giving Guthlac a helping hand when he needed it most. But could this also be a reference to hot weather burning away the vegetation to reveal a forgotten prehistoric site? Given the uncertainty of the poem's date, it is impossible to say. Intriguingly, however, experts believe that the Anglo-Saxon period was marked by meteorological extremes, with temperatures periodically matching the highs of the 21st century.

Beware of the dragon

Guthlac's barrow was far from a rarity in early medieval England. When the Anglo-Saxons began arriving in the British Isles in the fifth century, they found a landscape punctuated by prehistoric barrows and henges, and the stone remains of a more sophisticated architectural period: Roman Britain. What they saw filled them with wonder – and fear.

Barrows, in particular, terrified many, perhaps because so little was known about the origins of these ancient burial mounds. The Anglo-Saxons had no idea who erected them but they believed they were full of treasure – and cursed. Dragons, such as the one that battles the legendary hero Beowulf, were thought to guard the contents. (Hence the Anglo-Saxon proverb: "The dragon must be in the funeral-mound, wise and proud with treasures"). Stealing grave treasure was a bad idea, and it is this very act that causes the dragon in *Beowulf* to stir and slay the titular hero. In the later Anglo-Saxon period, prehistoric sites were used as places to execute criminals, suggesting that they continued to be seen as nefarious spaces.

Roman remains also inspired fear, but for

Anglo-Saxon archaeologists



Guthlac (right) in a c1210 manuscript. Legend has it that God revealed an ancient barrow to the English saint



St Laurence's in Bradford-on-Avon, one of the finest extant examples of an Anglo-Saxon church. The early English often built their churches from the rubble of Roman ruins

different reasons. When the Romans left Britain, most of their settlements remained abandoned, even when the Anglo-Saxons arrived. Given these buildings' magnificence, this may seem surprising. But the new settlers did not have an urban culture and built structures out of wood; cities such as Chester and Bath simply did not suit their way of life.

So Roman buildings were left to stand as grim monuments to the fall of a once-great civilisation. The Anglo-Saxons knew the identity of the civilisation that produced these great edifices, thanks to cultural memory and writers such as Orosius and Gildas. And this knowledge may have been responsible for the rich tradition of lament for the buildings' fate that fills Anglo-Saxon poetry.

One poem, *The Ruin*, describes the remnants of a Roman bathhouse, and so has long been interpreted as an account of the Roman ruins at Bath (a city not resettled until the nun Bertana founded Bath Abbey in the late seventh century). The poem notes how "the roofs are fallen, towers collapsed, the barred-gate removed".

The narrator imagines the city in its pomp, with "many mead halls full of joys". But, ominously, he also describes a former inhabitant as "decked with splendours, proud and merry with wine". He writes that the structures were "the work of giants", a reference to the belief that the great Tower of Babel was built by leviathans whose arrogance had got the better of them. This takes us to the crux of the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the Romans' downfall: they had become too sinful and so were punished by God.

Another Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Wanderer*, is even more unsparing in its description of a great civilisation's fall. "The wise man must understand how terrible it will

The ruins of great Roman cities like Bath reminded the Anglo-Saxons of the coming apocalypse

be when all of this world's riches stand to waste," it observes, "just as now variously throughout this middle-earth walls stand, blown against by the wind." By contemplating the ruins, *The Wanderer*'s narrator is reminded of the coming apocalypse, when the world will be destroyed at God's behest.

Building on the past

The Anglo-Saxons may have contemplated ancient monuments with a sense of foreboding, but they were also content to re-appropriate them. Some important early Anglo-Saxons were buried in or alongside prehistoric barrows, and the Roman missionaries who arrived to convert the heathen Anglo-Saxons in 597 were given a mandate by Pope Gregory I to build churches over existing sites of communal importance.

One reason for this is that Roman remains provided useful masonry for the churches founded from the seventh century. But the policy of building on existing monuments can also be seen as an attempt to align the present with the past. It was a means of signalling the continuity of religious practices and of providing a visible demonstration of the new English church's links with Rome.

This also applies to the re-use of prehistoric barrows for Anglo-Saxon graves, which was surely an example of an immigrant population aligning itself with the past in order to signal its right to own and occupy the land.

Like us, the Anglo-Saxons were fascinated by history. The visible remains of the past helped forge a sense of national identity, just as they do today. Yet, with authorities such as the Venerable Bede advising that the world was already into its final age, archaeological remains of the former occupiers of the British Isles also reminded them of the coming apocalypse, and the ephemeral nature of their own achievements.

We do not share this sentiment, but perhaps we should. In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned world leaders that they have just 12 years to save the world from "catastrophe". The very increase in global temperatures highlighted by the report may lie behind the sudden reappearance of ancient monuments in summer 2018. Faced with such a looming threat, perhaps we should all take a leaf out of *The Wanderer*'s book when admiring archaeological remains. ■

Dr Tim Flitton is a freelance writer specialising in medieval England. His book *Basilisks and Beowulf* will be published by Reaktion Books

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Thatcher / 1979



1979: Britain in meltdown

From gravediggers' strikes and the murder of an MP to a thriving National Front... in the 12 months before Margaret Thatcher's first election victory, Britain appeared to be in the grip of a nervous breakdown.

Phil Tinline paints a portrait of a nation on the edge

Accompanies the Archive on 4 documentary *1979 - Democracy's Nightmares*, produced and presented by Phil Tinline





Riots, rubbish and rock'n'roll

1 Tony Benn speaks at a 'no cuts' rally in Hyde Park, 1979. A year earlier, the Labour MP had written of his fears that he might be "polished off"

2 The Clash on stage at the Rock Against Racism carnival, held in Victoria Park, Hackney, April 1978

3 A protestor in a headlock, Southall, April 1979, when a member of the Anti-Nazi League died after being struck on the head

4 Members of a new cohort of female rock stars, including Poly Styrene and Siouxsie Sioux, London 1980

5 National Front supporters give the Nazi salute at a demonstration in east London, April 1979

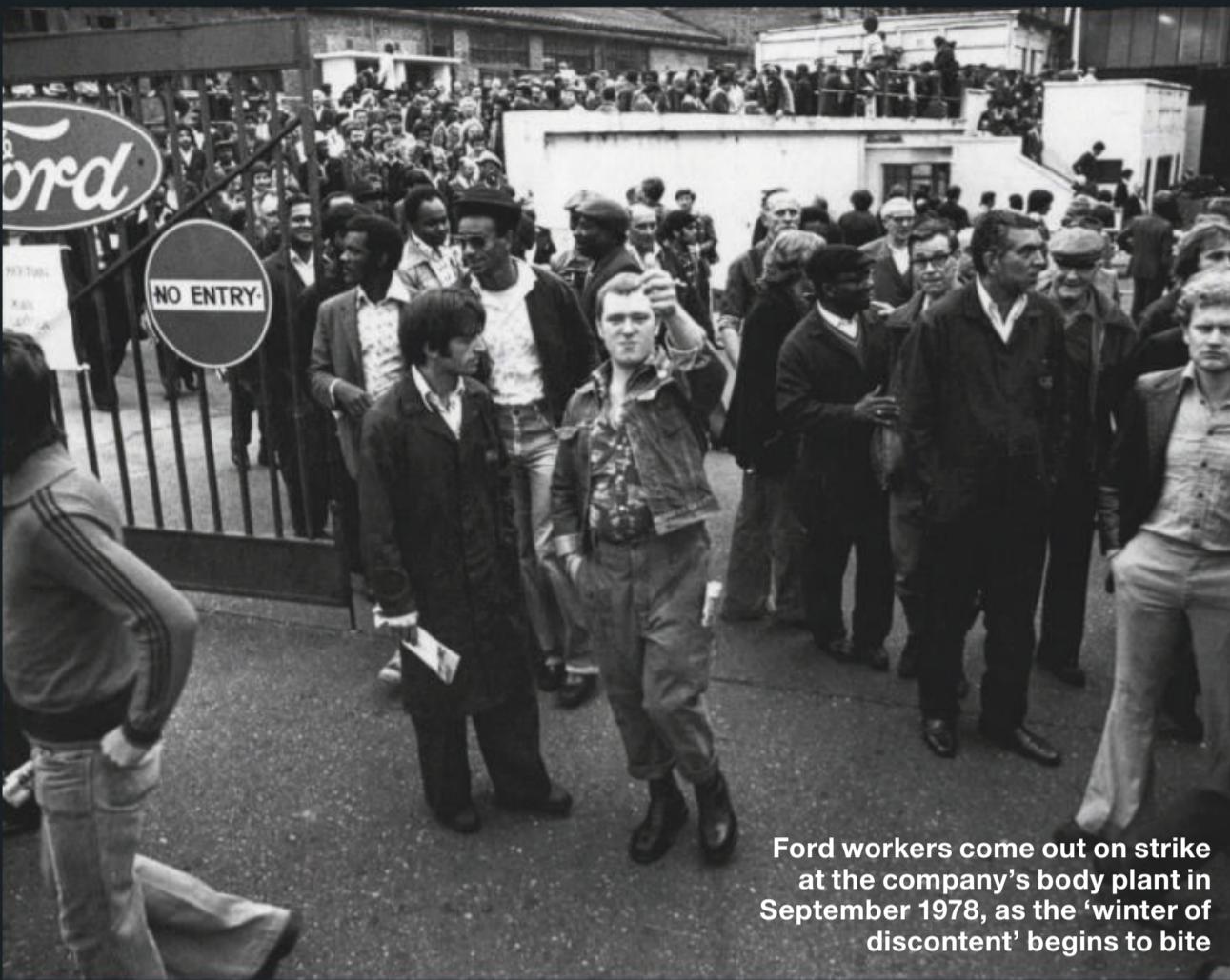
6 Tory MP Airey Neave, who was assassinated on 30 March 1979

7 A protest against the National Front, West Bromwich, April 1979

8 Jeremy Thorpe arrives at the Old Bailey, picketed by gay rights protestors, June 1979

9 A man walks past a pile of rubbish in September 1978, as refuse collectors, lorry drivers and hospital workers take industrial action





Ford workers come out on strike at the company's body plant in September 1978, as the 'winter of discontent' begins to bite



In 7 October 1978, the Labour government's energy secretary, just back from his party's Blackpool conference, confided a fear to his diary. "It occurs to me,"

mused Tony Benn, "that I made quite a few new enemies at conference this week: BP, for saying that we'd bring it into public ownership; the security services, for suggesting select committee supervision; the generals, for saying they were hired to work for elected ministers and not the other way around. I wonder whether they might just try to polish me off. Sounds extreme, I know," he added, "but things may be very much worse than we think."

Britain was in an extreme frame of mind, in those last months before Margaret Thatcher won the May 1979 election. The government struggled with inflation, strikes and, increasingly, unemployment. Well-qualified professionals had been fleeing to America, while migrants from the Commonwealth had been arriving, to widespread hostility. Vandalism, football hooliganism and squatting were commonplace. Britain was a nation on the edge. And to some, extremism – of left or right – seemed the only answer.

So it's possible that Benn had reason to be scared. In February 1981, the investigative journalist Duncan Campbell reported in the *New Statesman* magazine that a former MI6 operative claimed to have been asked by a senior politician to join a team – if Labour won and it looked as though Benn would become prime minister – to

"make sure Benn was stopped".

But why? The answer was that Benn was the champion of the rising socialist movement on the left of the Labour party; a team around him was beginning to prepare a bid for the leadership. In early 1979, it was perfectly plausible that he might soon be prime minister. To some on the hard right, this was unacceptable.

The man allegedly behind the scheme to 'stop' Prime Minister Benn was the Conservative shadow Northern Ireland secretary, and ex-wartime intelligence officer, Airey Neave. In the absence of further evidence, the story may well seem far-fetched – but the very fact that so serious a political figure as Benn had already worried he might be assassinated does tell us something about the anxiety levels of late 1970s politics. And then, six months after Benn's moment of fear, Neave was assassinated, when a bomb planted on his car detonated as he drove out of the House of Commons. The Irish National Liberation Army claimed responsibility.

In 1981, when Campbell contacted him about the allegation, Benn thought nobody would "believe for a moment that Airey Neave would have done such a thing". He worried that it was "the dirty tricks department trying to frighten me". But then, when the story was not picked up in the mainstream national press, he began to wonder if it might be true.

Assassination anxiety

Benn wasn't alone in harbouring these fears as the 1970s came to a close. In 1973, the elected Marxist president of Chile had been murdered in a military coup that brought a

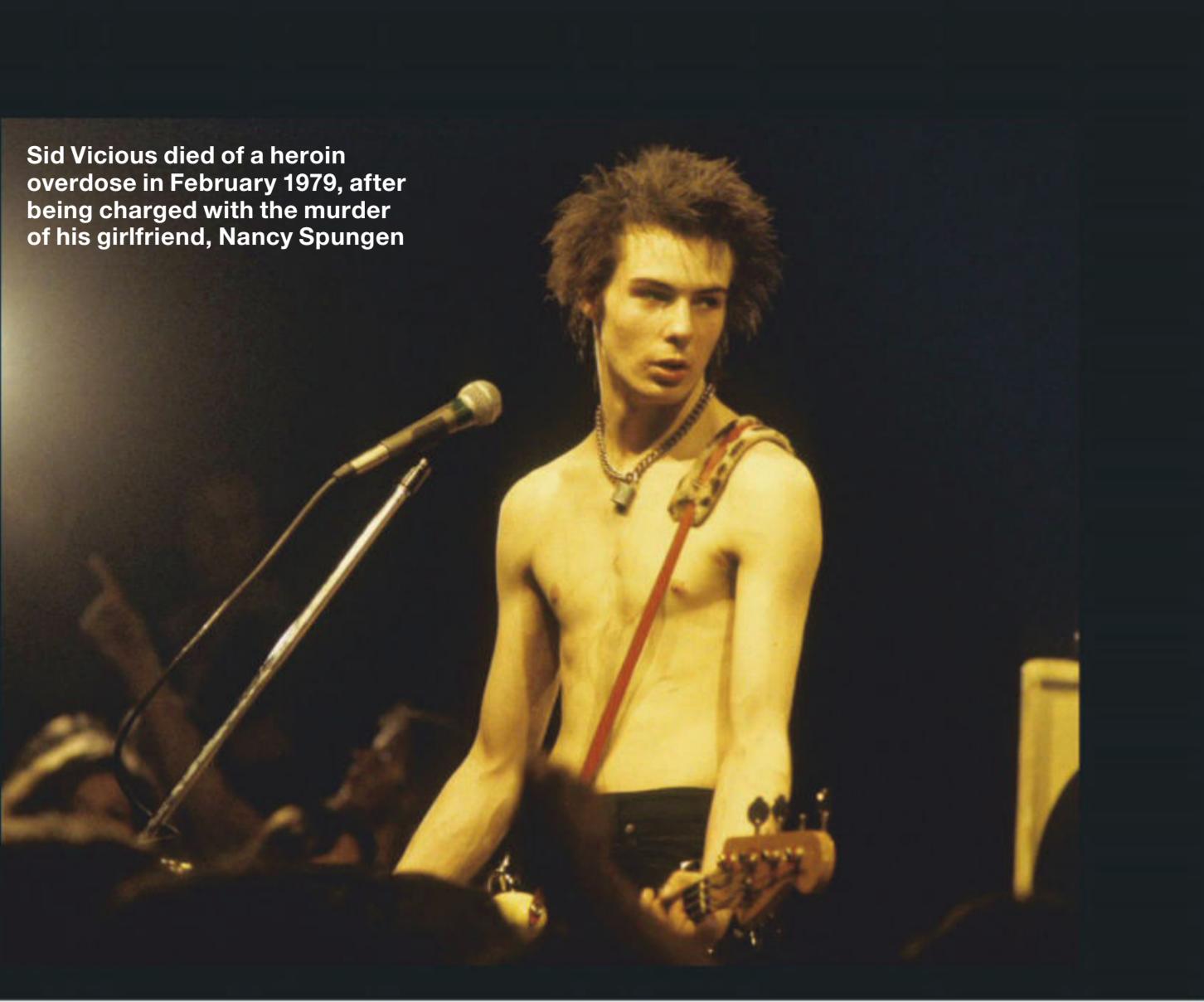
free-market dictatorship to power. Since then, many on the left had been haunted by the prospect of a violent rightwing takeover in Britain, orchestrated by a shifting mix of the security services, the military and the far-right. Benn's assassination anxiety in October 1978 is recorded in his diary immediately after a strange reference to the reappearance of a Special Branch detective who had supposedly been at the 1976 Labour conference "to see that the fascist groups got all the dirt on Wedgie Benn".

If Tony Benn was under surveillance, he wasn't the only one. Special Branch was certainly spying on Britain's leading fascist group: the National Front. In the decade since Enoch Powell's infamous 'rivers of blood' speech, the NF had ridden anxiety about immigration to go from neo-Nazi obscurity to signs of electoral success. In the 1973 West Bromwich byelection, one of the Front's leaders, Martin Webster, had won over 16 per cent of the vote, less than 3,000 behind the Conservative candidate. Even as racist murders mounted, the Front called for compulsory repatriation, and staged marches in areas with a high immigrant population.

In his 1977 study of the Front, the journalist Martin Walker noted that its bookshop now denied knowledge of its leader John Tyndall's 1961 tract, *The Authoritarian State*. As they began to win votes, they preferred to talk about 'British nationalism', and were more coy about wanting a dictatorship. Polling from the time suggests most weren't fooled. But in what was widely seen as a bid for potential NF votes, Thatcher told ITV in January 1978 that people were afraid that



Police clash with protesters at an Anti-Nazi League demonstration against the National Front, Southall 1979



Sid Vicious died of a heroin overdose in February 1979, after being charged with the murder of his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen

Britain might be “rather swamped by people with a different culture”.

In the 1979 general election, the Front were able to stand candidates in 303 constituencies. It was not a normal campaign. On 28 April, the NF held an election meeting in West Bromwich, where they had done so well six years earlier. They were confronted with an audience chanting “Nazi! Nazi!”. One of Tyndall’s colleagues gave them a “final warning” to “shut up or get out”, at which point a chair fight broke out – before a large phalanx of policemen charged in.

Attacking the NF as ‘Nazis’ was a favoured tactic of Trotskyist groups like the Socialist Workers’ Party, which in 1977 was instrumental in creating the Anti-Nazi League. Also on 28 April 1978, there was a march in Southall to commemorate a teacher called Blair Peach. Five days earlier, Peach had attended an ANL demonstration against a National Front meeting in the town hall, which turned into a confrontation with the police. Peach received a blow to the head and died the following day; the Metropolitan Police’s Special Patrol Group were blamed. The SPG, in their black, visored helmets, were feared by some on the left as the harbingers of an emerging rightwing police state.

Yet just as much as the left feared the right, the right feared the left – as in that spectre of a Benn government. April 1979 saw Thatcher warning an applauding crowd about the “Big Brother state that we’d get under socialism”. Labour had come to power in 1974 after a miners’ strike brought Edward Heath’s Conservative government close to breaking point. Heath had called an early election, in

As the number of racist murders mounted, the National Front called for compulsory repatriation

which Labour edged ahead, promising a ‘social contract’ with the unions. But at what cost? Many on the right saw a government under the control of the unions.

Looking back, it may seem obvious that all this would give way to Thatcherism. But it wasn’t clear that Thatcher could really make her radical free-market policies stick, if rocketing unemployment and huge strikes ensued. The alternative future came from the Bennite left’s strategy of sweeping nationalisation and import controls. To some, a bureaucratic dictatorship beckoned, under either Benn, the unions or both. In his despairing 1978 book *The Dilemma of Democracy*, the Conservative Lord Hailsham worried that “it is obvious that the National Front or the left wing of the Labour party would be compelled to govern by the methods of dictatorship if either ever obtained power”.

Finally, Labour’s last-ditch deal with union power started to crack. In September 1978, Ford workers went out on strike against the maximum government-approved raise of 5 per cent. As the ‘winter of discontent’ set in,

there was industrial action by lorry drivers, train drivers, ambulance drivers and hospital workers – then refuse collectors and gravediggers followed.

In Whitehall, all this posed the question of if and when to deploy troops; RAF and army personnel were called in to provide back-up during the ambulance strike. According to Bernard Donoghue, head of prime minister James Callaghan’s policy research unit, picketing of ports meant there was sufficient shortage of medicines that “ministers considered sending tanks into the ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries] medical headquarters to retrieve drugs and essential equipment”.

Death in New York

Away from the fraught world of industrial relations, October 1978 witnessed another high-profile tale of misery being played out – this one in the realm of rock music. Sid Vicious, late of the Sex Pistols, was holed up in the Chelsea Hotel in New York, sinking into a drug-induced oblivion with his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen. In 1976, punk had erupted in rebellion against everything from unemployment to the monarchy. The Sex Pistols’ battle-cries – “No Future”, “Destroy” – had something in common with their parents’ generation, which had also despaired of politics. When Nancy died of a stab wound, Sid was charged with her murder. On 2 February 1979, as Britons wondered whether the gravediggers’ strike meant bodies would have to be buried at sea, Sid Vicious died of a heroin overdose.

The collapse of the postwar consensus had conjured all kinds of political spectres. But for



Nurses picket
St Andrew's
hospital, 1978.
Margaret Thatcher
accused Labour of
being in thrall to the
power of the unions

punk, as for politicians, fear and despair and the destruction of old political taboos also created openings for something new. In national politics, enough people were now ready to try Thatcher's ideas for her to win power. Meanwhile, punk was becoming less about puke, more about purpose. You only have to listen to the relentless basslines that course through 1978 and 1979 post-punk tracks by the Clash, Public Image Limited, Joy Division, Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Slits, X-Ray Spex, Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire and The Jam to tell that this was a generation that was trying not just to rip everything up, but to start again.

And so, from the threat of the National Front, there sprang a strikingly creative response – Rock Against Racism. This began as a grassroots campaign in late 1976, reaching the national stage on 30 April 1978 with a huge carnival in Victoria Park in the East End of London, where the NF was strong. This was organised alongside the Anti-Nazi League. But in comparison to the far-left's willingness to damn NF leaders and supporters alike as Nazis and fight them in the streets, RAR's unifying cry for equality won much wider appeal. Tellingly, the Victoria Park line-up put three great equal rights causes together. Steel Pulse, soon to release their album *Handsworth Revolution*, brought radical anti-racist reggae. The Tom Robinson Band sang 'Glad to be Gay'. And X-Ray Spex's singer Poly Styrene took her sardonic vocal flamethrower to misogynist 1970s expectations of young women in music.

While women were gatecrashing the male party in music, they were doing the same in

politics – or at least one woman was. The ascent of Britain's first female prime minister was undoubtedly accelerated by the terminal crisis of politics brokered by ageing men in smoke-filled rooms. But Thatcher's rise presented feminists with a paradox – was she *really* a breakthrough? In a press conference during the election campaign, she noted that none of the Fleet Street papers was edited by a woman, and told one of the few female journalists present that "I could do a lot for women at the top, and women trying to get to the top, and for the acceptance of women and their talents and abilities". But suddenly she was insisting that "women like me – and maybe you – got where we are long before the women's lib movement", before declaring her dislike of "strident females". When the journalist asked if she accepted that women were "underprivileged as a sex", Thatcher sang the praises of stay-at-home mothers, but didn't directly address the question.

Gay rights visibility

Meanwhile, another identity politics campaign was also struggling forwards. In February 1979, the tenacious editor of *Gay News*, Denis Lemon, appealed to the House of Lords against a conviction for "blasphemous libel" for publishing a poem about a centurion having sex with the just-crucified Christ. Lemon lost his appeal. But his case, funded by members of the gay community, gave Lemon's pioneering newspaper a new visibility. As if to underline the grimness of gay men's old enforced invisibility, the Liberal party's former leader, Jeremy Thorpe, was heading for trial too – for conspiracy to murder his

Margaret Thatcher's election victory presented feminists with a paradox – was she *really* a breakthrough?

ex-lover, Norman Scott, to prevent their affair becoming public. Thorpe would be acquitted.

And then, on general election day – 3 May 1979 – a play by Martin Sherman, starring Ian McKellen, opened at the Royal Court Theatre in London. *Bent* was about the fate of homosexual men in 1930s Germany. It was an instant hit; Richard Gere was soon starring in it on Broadway. On BBC Radio's *Theatre Call* just after the premiere, Denis Lemon pointed out that the play was particularly relevant because resurgent Nazis in Britain, meaning the National Front, had put up so many candidates in the election.

And yet the NF were humiliated in that election, winning just 0.6 per cent of the vote. The Thatcher government was not the 'fascist' regime it was sometimes tarred as being. The fear of the imminent death of democracy dissipated. But the radicalism that all that political fear had unleashed – the way in which it acted as a rallying call for the campaigns against racism, sexism and homophobia – still shapes our lives today. ■

Phil Tinline is a BBC documentary maker. His Archive on 4 documentary 1979 *Democracy's Nightmares* goes out on BBC Radio 4 at 8pm on Saturday 27 April

Turn the page to read our feature on the impact of Thatcher's premiership on Britain

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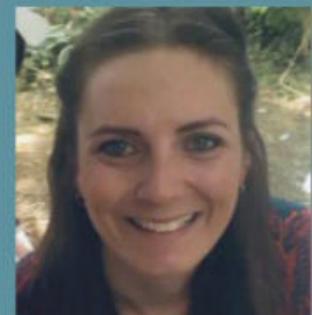
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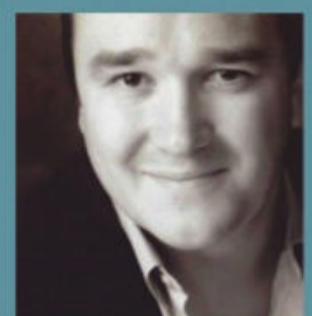
Eyes on the prize:
Margaret Thatcher
pictured in 1977,
two years after she
succeeded Ted Heath
as the leader of the
Conservative party

EVE ARNOLD-MAGNUM IMAGES

The panel



Amy Edwards
is a lecturer in modern British history at the University of Bristol with a particular research interest in Thatcherism and the 1980s



Dominic Sandbrook
is a historian, author and broadcaster, specialising in postwar Britain. His upcoming book charts the early years of Margaret Thatcher's premiership



Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite
is a historian of 20th-century Britain based at University College London who focuses on social change



Richard Vinen
is professor of history at King's College London and author of *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the Thatcher Era* (Simon & Schuster, 2009)

Are we still living in Thatcher's Britain?

It's 40 years since Margaret Thatcher first became prime minister. Did she engineer a break with the past? Or did she lead a nation that would have undergone profound change no matter who was in power? Four historians weigh the evidence

Complements the five-part BBC Two series *Thatcher*



Margaret Thatcher's premiership is widely regarded as one of the most radical in modern British history. How much of a political shift was her election as prime minister in May 1979?

Richard Vinen: Well the extent of the shift was not obvious at the time because I think that most people, including most Tory ministers, were sceptical about the prospects of introducing radical change. In some ways, her first two years in office went so badly that many people thought that the chances of radical change from the left had actually increased. The real turning point was probably her second election victory in 1983, when the Conservatives came in with an increased majority and a clearer sense of what they were going to do.

Amy Edwards: Our historical understanding of the 1980s has been somewhat overshadowed by the figure of Thatcher, partly because her time in office almost perfectly spanned the decade. The eighties witnessed many political – or at the very least, politicised – events that did not take their lead from Thatcher. For example Live Aid, the Aids crisis, the troubles in Northern Ireland, and the 1981 race riots. So in that sense, 1979 did not necessarily represent a fundamental shift in the politics of race, sexuality or nationality. That being said, the political economy since the 1980s has undoubtedly been transformed by the rhetoric and politics of Thatcher's Conservative party.

As a prime minister, how different was Thatcher from her predecessors?

AE: The most obvious and immediate difference is that she was a woman. Thatcher's gender became an important part of political discussions around her style and manner of leadership. Thatcher also liked to stress that she was different because she came from more humble beginnings than most of her predecessors. During the 1979 election campaign

the press placed a lot of focus on her background as a 'grocer's daughter', something that Thatcher did nothing to dispel in interviews. This aspect of her upbringing informed the basis of her ideology, shaping her understandings of things such as meritocracy, the welfare state and her preferred classless language of 'ordinary hard-working families'.

Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite: Thatcher's style – both in public, and in the way she managed her government and her party – was often much more combative than her predecessors. In 1972, Ted Heath, faced with the prospect that unemployment would pass the psychologically significant 1 million mark, allowed his chancellor, Anthony Barber, to increase government spending in order to engineer an economic boom. By contrast, in 1981, faced with a letter to *The Times* signed by 364 economists stating that her economic policies were wrong, Thatcher refused to change tack.

RV: Thatcher was a much less collegiate figure than her predecessors. In this sense, she marked a change in style that outlasted her premiership and influenced her successors.

Dominic Sandbrook: I think there were three big differences. First, she was much more moralistic. She talked in terms of good and evil, right and wrong, virtues and vices, which thrilled some people and horrified others. It's hard to imagine Harold Wilson or Edward Heath doing that. Second, she was a patriotic populist, self-consciously appealing to 'ordinary people' and promising to revive a lost golden age of national greatness. Finally, and most importantly, she was a woman. That coloured everything: the way people perceived her, the way she took decisions, her relationship with her ministers, even the kind of abuse she got from her critics.

How far was British society transformed during her 11 years in office?

FSB: It changed dramatically. In part, this stemmed from the ways in which Thatcher accelerated the shift to a service-sector economy and undermined the power of the trade union movement. Her flagship 'right to buy' policy, introduced in 1980, created a huge new cohort of homeowners – who, not coincidentally, were more likely to be Tory voters – and the relaxation of credit rules helped to create a society much more reliant on debt. But it wasn't clear that Thatcher had won a majority of people to her values. For example, in an opinion poll in 1988, 55 per cent of respondents said they wanted Britain to be a society "which emphasises the social



▲ **The grocer's daughter**
Margaret Thatcher (then Roberts) shown far right with her family (from left) sister Muriel, father Alfred, who served as an alderman and mayor of Grantham, and mother Beatrice



► **War leader**
Thatcher visits British troops in the Falkland Islands in 1983. British victory in the southern Atlantic was a key factor in the Conservatives winning the election that year



GETTY IMAGES/PA IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

"Thatcher talked in terms of **good and evil, right and wrong**, which thrilled some people and horrified others"

DOMINIC SANDBROOK



◀ **The left behind?**
Woolley Colliery in Yorkshire, pictured during the miners' strike of 1984–85. "Most of those who went through the strike felt that the Tory government was waging war on their communities," says Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite

and collective provision of welfare". Only 27 per cent of people felt that Britain really was such a society, though.

DS: Britain was clearly a very different country in 1990 from 1979. It was more open, more ambitious, more cosmopolitan and more forward-thinking, but also more aggressive, more individualistic and more unequal. In many ways, it was a much less conservative society. As in any period of rapid change – especially technological and industrial change – there are winners as well as losers, which is why it's a period that continues to provoke strong opinions.

To what extent can we attribute the major political, social and economic changes in Britain to Thatcher's political ideology as opposed to broader underlying forces?

AE: As with most questions about causation, the answer is a complicated one. Many features of the Thatcher years – both the Conservative party's ideology and changes in society – had longstanding roots and cannot therefore be attributed to Thatcher alone. Even Thatcher's ideology was a complex mix of traditional Conservatism, Christian morality and postwar economic theory. And to take just one example of social change: the rise of 1980s individualism was foreshadowed by greater levels of affluence from the mid-1950s, the subsequent arrival of a mass consumer society and the cultural liberation associated with the sexual revolution of the 1960s. So Thatcher's time in office was shaped by pre-existing forces and structures as much as it precipitated new ones.

RV: Some of the changes that happened in the 1980s might have happened anyway. Technology would have made it harder to sustain some of the natural monopolies that seemed to justify the existence of nationalised industries. Some changes did not directly relate to things that Thatcher did or even wanted. The spread of the free market sometimes went with a society that was more fluid in other ways.

One little noticed but important change came in 1984 when NM Rothschild & Sons appointed Kate Mortimer as the first ever female director of a UK merchant bank. I feel that would have happened regardless of whether Thatcher was prime minister.

Having said all this, the Thatcher government brought a drive and determination that would not otherwise have existed.

FSB: The social, economic and international context was changing in important ways in

"Identity politics exploded and **new social movements** complicated the class base of politics"

FLORENCE SUTCLIFFE-BRAITHWAITE

the 1960s and 1970s, and many of these shifts profoundly destabilised the social democratic framework of British politics. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system [aimed at regulating and stabilising currency exchange rates] and the spike in the price of oil in the early 1970s stimulated a shift towards a more globalised and free-market economic system. Meanwhile, the combination of high inflation, high unemployment and sluggish growth in 1970s Britain posed clear problems to established Keynesian understandings of the economy [which advocated government action and government spending to stimulate economic growth and combat unemployment in times of economic downturn].

Deindustrialisation had been happening in Britain for several decades, as the production of services increasingly replaced the extraction of raw materials and manufacturing in advanced economies. British society was growing more individualistic, and class identities and solidarities were changing in the 1960s and 1970s. Although this was the high point of trade unionism in Britain, it was also the moment when identity politics exploded, with new social movements built around gender, race and sexuality springing up, complicating the class bases of politics.

This context profoundly shaped Thatcherism, which is not to say Thatcherite shifts were inevitable, but that her ideology can only be understood in its broader context. Thatcher's reforms were one possible set of responses to this changing background.

Thatcher triumphed in three general elections. What do you think explains this success?

RV: The British electorate was un-Thatcherite in everything except its repeated willingness to elect governments headed by Margaret Thatcher. People often denounced the values they associated with Thatcherism but a large proportion also believed those values would leave them personally better off. Beyond that,

Thatcher / Historians' view

Thatcher was sometimes lucky. This was especially true in 1983 when she benefited from the Falklands War and from the fragmented state of the opposition.

FSB: Again, context is very significant here. In 1979, the 'winter of discontent' [when the public sector trade unions went on a series of strikes in protest at pay caps] and the widespread feeling that Labour was divided and lacked new ideas played a big part in Thatcher's victory. Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system also played a significant role. Thatcher's performance, in terms of proportion of the vote won, peaked in 1979 when the Tories won 43.9 per cent of the vote and 339 seats in the House of Commons. In 1983, they won a slightly smaller proportion of votes (42.4 per cent), but a massive 397 seats.

What had changed was that the distribution of votes had altered, with the anti-Thatcher vote split in some seats, delivering an even larger majority for the Conservatives. But this doesn't mean to say that Thatcher's victories in 1983 and 1987 can be attributed solely to the split in Labour. It's likely that a significant proportion of those who voted for the breakaway Social Democratic Party in those elections would have chosen the Tories over Labour in a straight fight. Thatcher constructed a vision of 'ordinary, hard-working' British people that cut across blue-collar and white-collar workers to build a winning electoral coalition.

AE: Each election had unique characteristics that help explain the party's success. For example, the Falklands War undoubtedly influenced the outcome of the 1983 election. But across all three the strength of the Conservative party's political communication was a consistent feature. As party leader, Thatcher oversaw an intensification in the use of marketing techniques. This is best characterised by her employment of a TV producer, Gordon Reece, as the party's director of publicity in 1978. At his behest, the Conservatives enlisted the services of advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi. The results were palpable. The party produced a number of memorable campaigns, including the infamous 1978 "Labour Isn't Working" [later "Labour Still Isn't Working"] poster, depicting a long and winding dole queue.

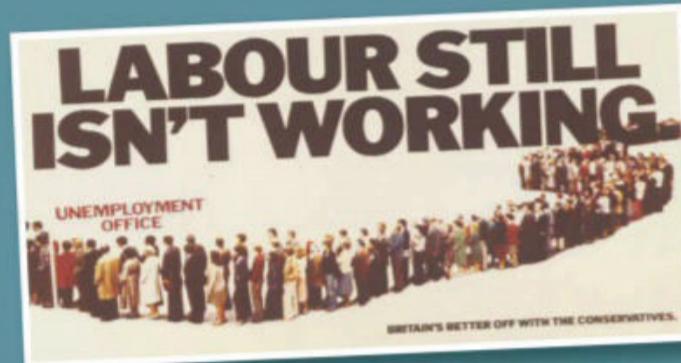
What do you see as the greatest achievements of Margaret Thatcher's time in office?

FSB: Thatcher's most profound and lasting legacy was the way in which she shifted the 'common sense' of British political economy. It is not clear that the performance of the



▲ Political handbagging

Thatcher holds up two shopping bags to show how much less a pound would buy due to inflation under Labour
RIGHT: This poster from the 1979 election campaign epitomised the Conservatives' hard-hitting advertising strategy under Thatcher



economy was dramatically transformed during Thatcher's time in power: inflation was 9.5 per cent in 1990, compared with 13.4 per cent in 1979 (measured in terms of the Retail Price Index), but growth was down – a 0.7 per cent increase in GDP in 1990, compared with 3.7 per cent in 1979 (according to the Office of National Statistics). Yet no longer was it possible to champion nationalised industries, high taxes and generous welfare systems, or to denigrate the free market, without seeming old-fashioned or out of touch. Hence Labour's gradual acceptance of key Thatcherite assumptions about the economy in the later 1980s and 1990s.

"I think Thatcher was **mistaken** to undermine public belief in the value of government intervention"

AMY EDWARDS

DS: I think when you lift your gaze from all the minutiae, two things stand out. First, she undoubtedly revived Britain's national self-confidence, which was at a very low ebb in the late 1970s. Nobody was talking about the 'sick man of Europe' or the 'British disease' by the time she left office. Second, Britain was keener to embrace change, less introverted and defensive, and much more open to foreign influence and overseas investment. That brought immense benefits, but for many people it was very unsettling, which is partly why not everybody remembers her fondly.

And what were her biggest mistakes?

AE: In terms of her own political project and longevity in office, the attempt to introduce the Community Charge (or poll tax) was a huge failure. The policy resulted in the London poll tax riot in 1990, mass civil disobedience and cabinet resignations.

In terms of social and political cost, I think Thatcher was mistaken to undermine public belief in the value and power of government intervention. This contributed to a longer term distrust in politicians and 'bureaucrats', which can be seen in low voter turnouts in elections throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

DS: Like all prime ministers she made specific policy mistakes, for example not building more council houses or the debacle of the poll



▲ **Summer of discontent** A number of British cities were convulsed by rioting in the summer of 1981, as tensions between the police and black communities escalated. Here police are pictured before damaged buildings in Toxteth, Liverpool

tax. But I think the biggest error was one of tone. Because she saw herself as a fighter, she was incapable of being magnanimous. She never really threw off the partisan gloves; she never gave ground, never admitted error; and she never empathised with people who were the losers from social and economic change. She could never rise above conflict and play the national stateswoman, and some people never forgave her for it.

Thatcher has always been a divisive political figure. Why do you think she did, and still does, arouse such admiration and hostility?

FSB: Recently, I've been conducting interviews with women from coalfield communities around Britain. One thing many interviewees talk about is the stark changes wrought in their areas since the 1980s. Britain's coalfields were thriving places, with strong local economies and communities. People had jobs, high streets had shops, and whole areas had a sense of pride and prosperity. These things have all been eroded since the miners' strike of 1984–85.

Even those who acknowledge that the eventual decline of coal was inevitable – very few advanced capitalist economies have deep coal mining industries in 2019 – also point out that in other countries, like Germany, a slow, managed rundown brought much less social dislocation. Most of those who went

through the strike felt that the Tory government was waging war on their communities, didn't care about their livelihoods, and had nothing but disdain for their communities and their way of life.

Thatcher staked her political reputation on her ambition to sweep away the old 'consensus', in the belief that the free market would bring efficiency and prosperity. The legacy of her approach is high levels of inequality and, in particular, high levels of regional inequality. This is key to understanding why she arouses such strong admiration from some, and such strong hostility from others.

RV: Partly because she has become a kind of

"Thatcher has become a kind of **national alibi**, blamed for policies that people had, in fact, supported"

RICHARD VINEN

national alibi. At times, particularly in the aftermath of the miners' strike, people blamed her for policies that they had, in fact, supported. Her sex also has a lot to do with it. One is struck by the misogyny of attacks on Margaret Thatcher.

Was Thatcher one of Britain's greatest prime ministers?

DS: To some extent greatness is obviously in the eye of the beholder. But you can recognise that somebody was a titanic historical figure – Henry VIII, say, or Napoleon – without necessarily liking or approving of them. And whatever you think of her policies, Mrs Thatcher was the first female prime minister, won three consecutive elections, won a war, became an international symbol of Britishness, transformed both her own party and the main opposition party, and left an indelible mark on the national imagination. If all that doesn't qualify you for greatness, then it's time to scrap the category.

FSB: Assessing 'greatness' is hard to do without taking an explicitly political standpoint. Thatcher was certainly one of Britain's longest-serving prime ministers, and her governments changed the direction of Britain's political economy in a way that only a few governments before had managed. The last prime minister to preside over such a significant transformation was Clement Attlee [in the wake of the Second World War].

RV: I am not sure that greatness is a term that I like. She certainly presided over spectacular transformations and, to some extent, did things that other leaders would have found difficult. Like Winston Churchill – the comparison that she herself would probably like – she became closely identified with a particular time, though one should also stress that much of her style might just have seemed absurd had she come to prominence 15 years earlier or later.

AE: The answer to this question is one almost entirely dependent on political perspective. Understanding Thatcher's impact requires us to look not only at national politics and economic change, but also to consider individual experiences of the 1980s and subsequent years. Her policies left a complicated legacy which the term 'greatness' doesn't necessarily help us to analyse. To take just one example, the deregulation of Britain's financial services sector, combined with technological innovation, contributed to the emergence of new global financial structures. How people experienced the ascendancy of a financial service sector economy centred in



▲ Products of Thatcherism? New Labour titans Gordon Brown (left) and Tony Blair in 2005. Like Thatcher, both placed the financial sector at the heart of the British economy

the capital varies hugely by region as well as by class, and other analytical categories such as gender and race.

Have subsequent prime ministers sought to follow in her footsteps?

DS: John Major failed to emerge from her shadow. Tony Blair cast himself as her more emollient heir. Gordon Brown invited her for tea at Number 10 as soon as he became prime minister. Like Major, David Cameron tried to find a more moderate Conservative way forward and failed. Most obviously, Theresa May's supporters tried to present her as the new Iron Lady. The irony is the Thatcher of today's political imagination is a caricature. She was far more cautious, pragmatic and even pro-European than we often remember.

AE: Historians, journalists and political commentators alike argue that New Labour should be viewed as Thatcher's 'greatest achievement'. Thatcher herself is reported to have said as much at a dinner in 2002. It would be disingenuous to conflate New Labour with Conservativism. But certain features of Tony Blair's premiership shared remarkable similarities to Thatcher's. For example, there were clear continuities in Blair's focus on fostering an 'enterprise culture' in British society.

In 1999, Blair unveiled his ambitions for

New Labour to "be the champion of entrepreneurs". In the same speech, he reaffirmed his commitment to placing the financial sector and capital markets at the centre of Britain's economy, informing an audience of venture capitalists that: "We need society as a whole to applaud you... the front-line troops of Britain's new economy."

RV: I am struck by the paradox that Labour PMs (Brown and Blair) evoked Thatcher's memory as a means of reflecting the changes in their own party, and of discomfiting the opposition, while Conservatives (Major and Cameron) often adopted a self-consciously non-Thatcherite style even when continuing with Thatcherite policies.

FSB: Subsequent prime ministers have mainly followed within the basic parameters of the political economy that Thatcher set up. The free market has been celebrated, supply-side economics favoured, nationalised industries broken up and inflation targeted as the great economic ill. Most subsequent prime ministers have looked more favourably on the EEC/EU than Thatcher, but it's important to remember that, initially, Thatcher was generally supportive of the European project, only turning decisively against it later. In style and tone, though, most have sought to break with Thatcher's example, seeking a more

consensual approach. This was what most clearly set John Major apart from Thatcher.

Do we still live in Thatcher's Britain?

FSB: Many facets of Britain today have been profoundly shaped by Thatcher and Thatcherism. Some of Thatcher's policies had unintended consequences, though. Thatcher envisaged a nation of homeowners, but in London, the right to buy has also created a city filled with private landlords and insecure renters. We should also remember that many of our most important national institutions were created long before the 1980s. When we use the NHS and the universal secondary education system, we are still living in the world that the Attlee government created.

DS: We live in a Britain shaped by the changes of the 1980s, but not Thatcher's Britain. Most of the major changes would have happened anyway. What happened to Britain happened to every other major western industrial country. The obsession with Mrs Thatcher is basically the last relic of 'great man', or rather 'great woman', history. Blaming a woman who became prime minister in 1979 for everything you dislike about Britain in 2019 strikes me as a self-evidently infantile way of understanding historical change.

AE: There is no question that Britain today bears many marks of Thatcher's time in office. Most significant of these is the more market-driven, competitive culture of enterprise which now dominates not only business and industry, but also areas previously understood to have purpose and value entirely distinct from issues of profit. Prime among these are healthcare and education. If you want to understand things like the introduction of student fees and the outsourcing of NHS services, then you can do worse than to study the politics and policies of Thatcherism.

RV: Ten years ago, I would have said that Thatcher had secured the free market in economics and her successors had then married this with a social liberalism of which Thatcher would probably have disapproved. Now everything seems up for grabs. Perhaps we will look back on the period from 1979 to 2016 as a parenthesis in British history before a Corbyn socialism or a Tory nationalism that seems to regard economics as being of secondary importance. ■

Compiled by Rob Attar

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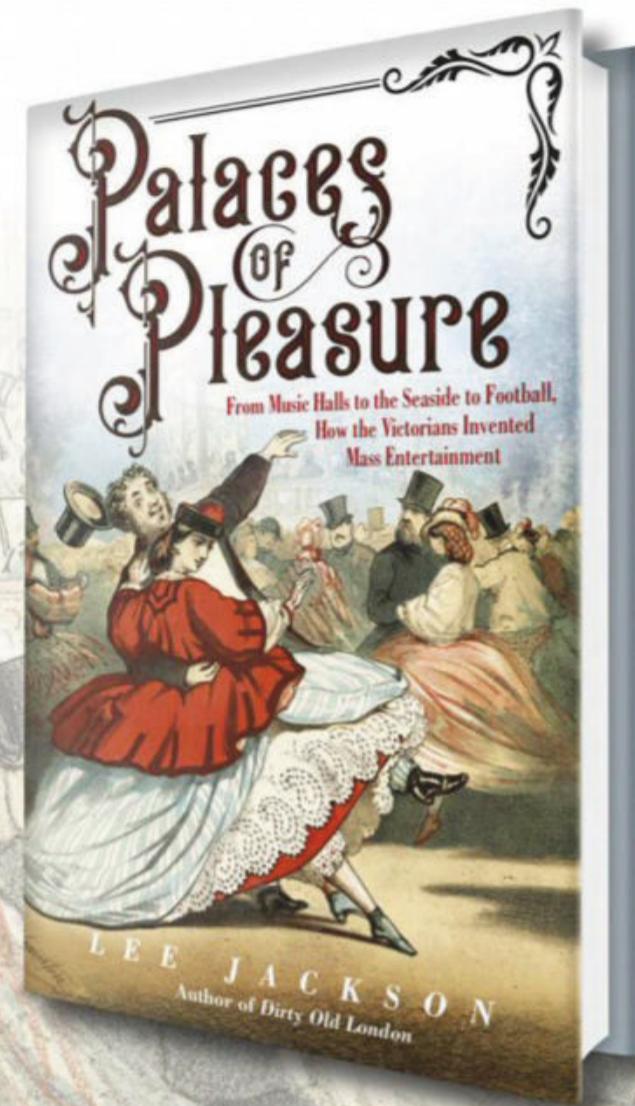
► The five-part BBC Two series **Thatcher** is due to air in late May. Check out our website for more details

'A treasure-chest of a book...

Queen Victoria may not have been amused – but her subjects certainly knew where and how to party.'

– Liza Picard, author of *Victorian London*

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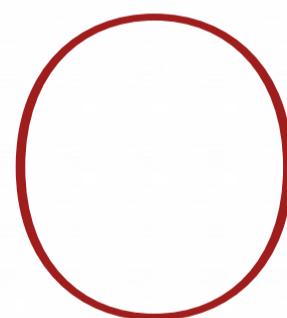


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Cheap thrills for the chattering classes

The 19th century saw the rise of a new breed of stage show offering theatregoers sexual titillation with the veneer of propriety. **Joanne Cormac** introduces the melange of elite culture and bawdy humour that was Victorian burlesque



In 21 December 1865 a fashionable crowd gathered at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in the heart of London's West End. Respectable ladies and gentlemen alighted from their carriages to settle into the theatre's comfortable, cushioned seating. They engaged in a little star-spotting, hoping that the Prince of Wales himself might be among the company. They admired their sumptuous surroundings, their eyes drawn to the proscenium arch, decorated with the Prince of Wales's heraldic badge. Then they fell silent and the curtain rose...

What exploded onto the stage can only be described as a riotous medley of elite culture and bawdy comedy. In one scene the audience was titillated by a young actress in tight breeches attempting to seduce an older, bearded actor, unconvincingly costumed as a young girl. A semblance of sobriety was restored when a soprano sang an operatic aria in earnest, accompanied by a full orchestra. But the audience fell about laughing when she

whipped out a banjo and quickly segued into blackface minstrel song and dance. (Though it is widely regarded as offensive now, minstrelsy was popular with the Victorians, including Queen Victoria herself.)

Behind the performers, ingenious scenery changes and state-of-the-art magnesium lighting transported the audience from rain-sodden London to a beautiful sunset in a Spanish vineyard and then on to a winter garden full of fairies. These exotic sets mingled with forms of entertainment far more familiar to the 19th-century theatre-goer: scantily clad chorus girls, clog dances, parlour songs and plenty of terrible puns.

Money to burn

Welcome to the riotous world of Victorian burlesque. Nowadays 'burlesque' might conjure images of corsets, fishnet stockings and striptease. To the men and women taking their seats in the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1865, however, it was entirely different: they craved something that both titillated them *and* enabled them to demonstrate their middle-class respectability. That burlesque succeeded in meeting these

competing demands makes it one of the most remarkable forms of entertainment of the 19th century.

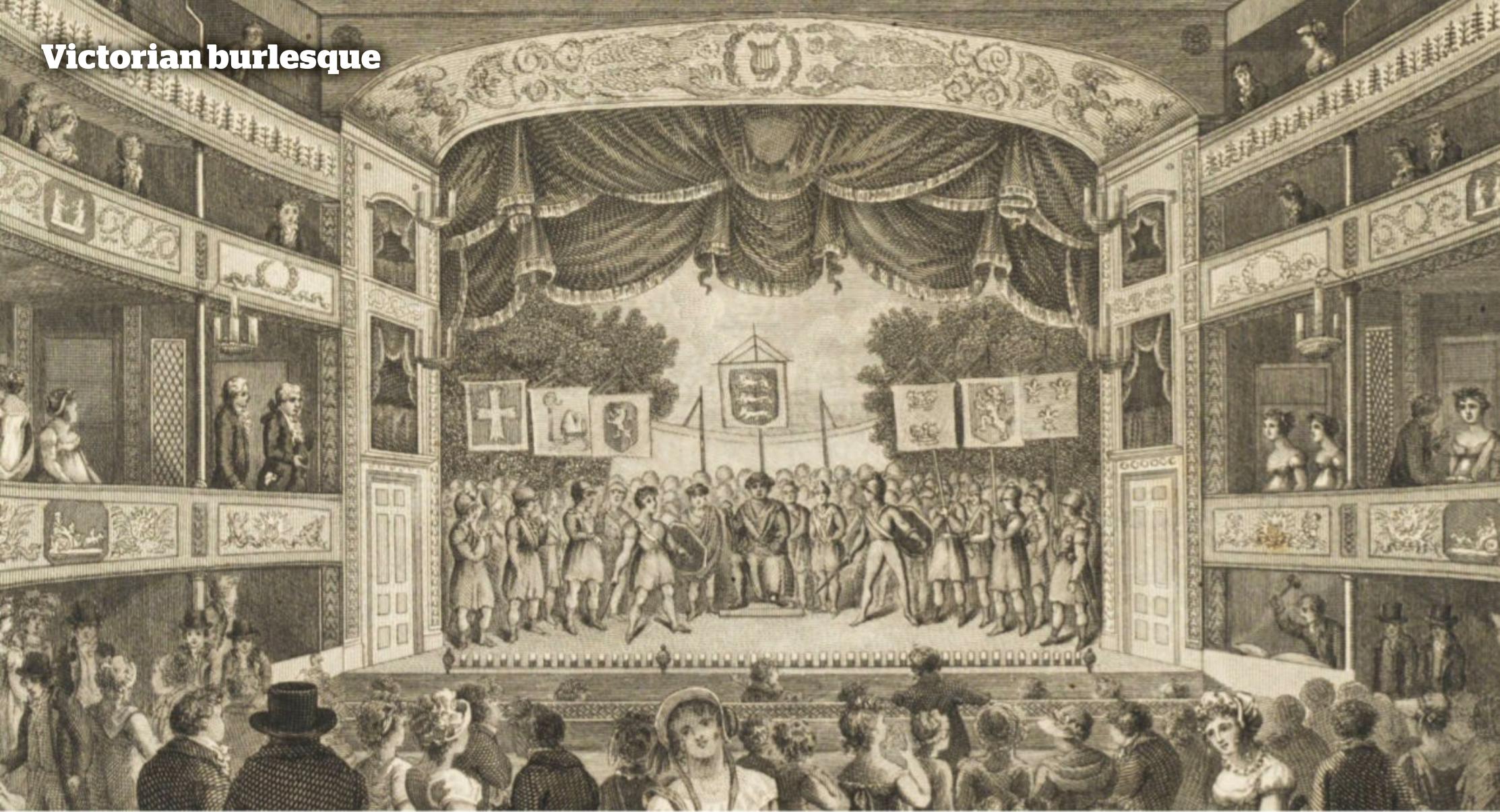
So what exactly was Victorian burlesque? In many ways it was similar to music hall: both offered variety performances including song, dance and comedy. But burlesques were unique. They lampooned high-class culture – especially opera, Shakespeare and those who revelled in their classical educations – and often targeted plays or operas then running at Covent Garden or Drury Lane. Indeed, the burlesque being shown at the Prince of Wales's Theatre that night in December 1865 loosely followed the plot of Mozart's much-loved opera *Don Giovanni*.

Burlesque was born in working-class London theatres. At the start of the 19th century, these were often grimy, seedy places: audiences drank beer and consorted with prostitutes in the dimly lit foyers, while scantily-clad women danced provocatively, and bawdy comedy was performed on stage. At this time, theatres had a tarnished reputation as places of drunkenness and public displays of sexuality.

Working-class theatre could also be

A song and dance
A souvenir for a burlesque
adaptation of the classic
opera *Carmen* at the
Gaiety Theatre, 1890





A 19th-century theatre. One of burlesque's defining features was its mockery of opera's snootiness and the absurdity of its plots

Productions had to appeal to repressed middle-class gentlemen's sexual appetites, while providing references to Shakespeare

provocative in a political sense. The satire found in burlesques was often subversive, criticising the aristocracy and controversial legislation like the new Poor Law of 1834.

But the landscape was changing. By mid-century the West End had become a place of impeccable respectability. This was partly due to the campaigning of writers like Charles Dickens, who argued that theatre had redemptive, educational powers. Perhaps more influential was the realisation that upper-middle-class tourists had money to burn. Theatre managers cleaned up their establishments so that their new audiences felt safe in them. Gradually, the West End morphed into a stylish hub of shopping, leisure and entertainment.

Some types of performances now went out of fashion. It was no longer possible to put on vulgar melodramas like *Zarah the Gypsy Girl* at the Queen's Theatre for sixpence,

and expect audiences to flock to enjoy the sensational murder scenes.

Burlesque was being pulled in two directions. A burlesque production would not be complete without chorus girls kicking their bare legs, but the audience now wore dinner jackets and evening dresses, and their programmes were printed on silk.

Some wondered if burlesque could ever escape its past. Its use of lowest-common-denominator humour, such as slang and terrible puns, drew criticism. Yet, these aspects also formed part of its appeal.

Such competing priorities may explain the treatment meted out to one unfortunate member of the audience at London's Strand Theatre in 1865. The woman had the temerity to take her seat in a low-cut dress – a 'crime' that subjected her to a barrage of hisses from the gallery, forcing her to draw her opera cloak around her shoulders and beat a hasty exit. Given the theatre's earlier reputation as a den of iniquity, it is likely the audience took her for a

prostitute. In their anxiety that burlesque should now be respectable, they felt compelled to expel her from the theatre.

As this incident suggests, burlesque held a precarious position within the minefield of Victorian snobbery and social politics. In many ways, its bawdiness challenges the modern stereotype of the prudish Victorian: our 19th-century predecessors liked sex as much as any other generation, and those putting on the productions sought to appeal to repressed middle-class gentlemen's sexual appetites. All the while, however, burlesque had to provide references to Shakespeare to provide a veneer of propriety.

French seaside towns

So how did burlesque managers walk this tightrope? Their solution was to make the satire less pointed, less questioning of the status quo, more given to snobbery. WS Gilbert's *Robert the Devil; or, the Nun, Dun, and the Son of a Gun* (a parody of Meyerbeer's opera) sneered at people who went day-tripping to Margate instead of holidaying in the more fashionable French seaside towns. Leicester Silk Buckingham's *Lucrezia Borgia! At Home and All Abroad* (targeting Donizetti's opera) played on a bugbear of the middle classes: the high rate of income tax.

Clever musical choices also enabled managers to profit from burlesque's risqué reputation without alienating their respectable audiences. Composers included popular genres like minstrelsy and parlour songs in their arrangements, drawing the line at

Performers at the Vaudeville in the increasingly elitist West End, 1871





The cover of a programme from the Gaiety Theatre, 1889. Victorian burlesque was a smash hit with the middle classes

working-class music hall tunes. Minstrel songs were rewritten with references to elite culture, or segued into operatic arias or fashionable operetta. And the whole performance took place in grand surroundings.

Not everyone was a fan of this riotous marriage of sex and sophistication. In January 1865, *Punch* opined that "The method of getting up a burlesque, extravaganza or pantomime differs according to the theatre where it is produced. The piece itself is scribbled, off-hand, on bits of waste paper, backs of old envelopes, and the like. Sometimes the greater part of the MS [manuscript] is written on shaving paper during the author's toilette."

It was the dancers' attire that most offended *Fun* magazine. In its review of *Robert the Devil* in 1896, it observed: "We may note particularly that the – shall we call it dress? of the principal danseuse was so extremely sketchy that a few years back – ere the introduction of the can-can had expanded British tolerance – it would have been publicly condemned."

The critics may have been sniffy but, for the most part, audiences enjoyed the dovetailing of operatic music and popular genres. *Lucrezia Borgia! At Home and All Abroad*, for example, included a clever transition from 'Com'è Bello', an aria from the original opera, into Stephen Foster's parlour song 'Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming'.

Yet burlesque writers could also be merciless in their mockery of the snootiness and exoticism of opera. In *The Lady of the Cameleon* (a burlesque of Verdi's *La Traviata*), the tragic

heroine, Violetta, became the rather more down-to-earth Vile Letty, a fish seller. In *Little Don Giovanni*, audiences were amused when the statue of the Commendatore, who comes to life to drag Don Giovanni down to hell in the original opera, put up his umbrella in the burlesque to shelter from the London rain. Opera's exoticism, elitism and the absurdity of its plots were all targets for ridicule.

We can see this in the arrangement of the minstrel song 'The Pullback' in *Little Don Giovanni*. It was scored as an ensemble piece and ended with a roll call of operatic arias. Those in the audience able to recognise these arias could feel smug, and raise a smile as the burlesque song turned these titles into a hodge-podge of foreign-sounding words.

A shapely pair of legs

Even though they were now respectable, burlesques still offered audiences sexual titillation. Alongside a chorus of beautiful young women, most burlesques included a trouser role for a woman playing a boy. The opportunity to admire a pair of shapely legs in a reputable setting remained an important part of the genre's appeal. In *Little Don Giovanni*, the Don was played by the popular burlesque actress and manager of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, Marie Wilton. Wilton's performance was greatly admired by one reviewer, who declared: "It is impossible to conceive a prettier, brisker, nattier or neater little libertine than Miss Marie Wilton looks in a pink doublet, slashed with gold embroidery and bright blue satin knickerbockers."

In many ways, Marie Wilton's story echoed the rise of burlesque itself. She had begun her career delivering the crude, outrageous puns that were a signature of the genre, before making the transition to legitimate comedy, earning a reputation as one of the leading actresses of the day. Like Wilton, burlesque had to traverse the notoriously tricky terrain of Victorian social and sexual politics before it could establish its place in the nation's affections. It was a long journey – one that required it to reinvent itself to meet changing public tastes. But, as a string of box-office hits in the 1860s and 70s attests, burlesque was up to the challenge. ■

Joanne Cormac is a Leverhulme early career research fellow at the University of Nottingham. She was editor of *30-Second Classical Music* (Ivy Press, October 2017)

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Burlesque's leading lights

The brilliant comic

Nellie Farren (1848–1904)

aspired to be a tragic actress, but found fame in the burlesque roles she played at the Olympic Theatre. She and her husband, Robert Soutar, had a long relationship with the Gaiety Theatre, which they joined in 1868. Although her singing and speaking voice was mediocre, Farren was a formidable comic talent, whose slim frame made her suited to breeches roles.



The sublime satirist

WS Gilbert (1836–1911) is best known for the comic operas he created with Arthur Sullivan. However, earlier in his career Gilbert honed his talent for satire and musical comedy as a writer of burlesques. His first was written in 10 days; *Dulcamara, or the Little Duck and the Great Quack* was based on Donizetti's opera *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Gilbert wrote five opera burlesques, the most successful of which was *Robert the Devil; or, the Nun, the Dun and the Son of a Gun*. It premiered at the Gaiety in 1868 with Nellie Farren in the lead role.

The fans' favourite

Lucia Elizabeth Vestris (1797–1856)

was an actress, opera singer and a successful manager of the Olympic Theatre, where she produced and starred in burlesques. Audiences and reviewers greatly admired her perfect legs, displayed in tight elastic pantaloons, when she played the title role in the hit burlesque, *Don Giovanni in London*. Plaster cast models of her legs were even sold as souvenirs from a stall outside the theatre. Vestris was romantically linked to a series of powerful men, including George IV.



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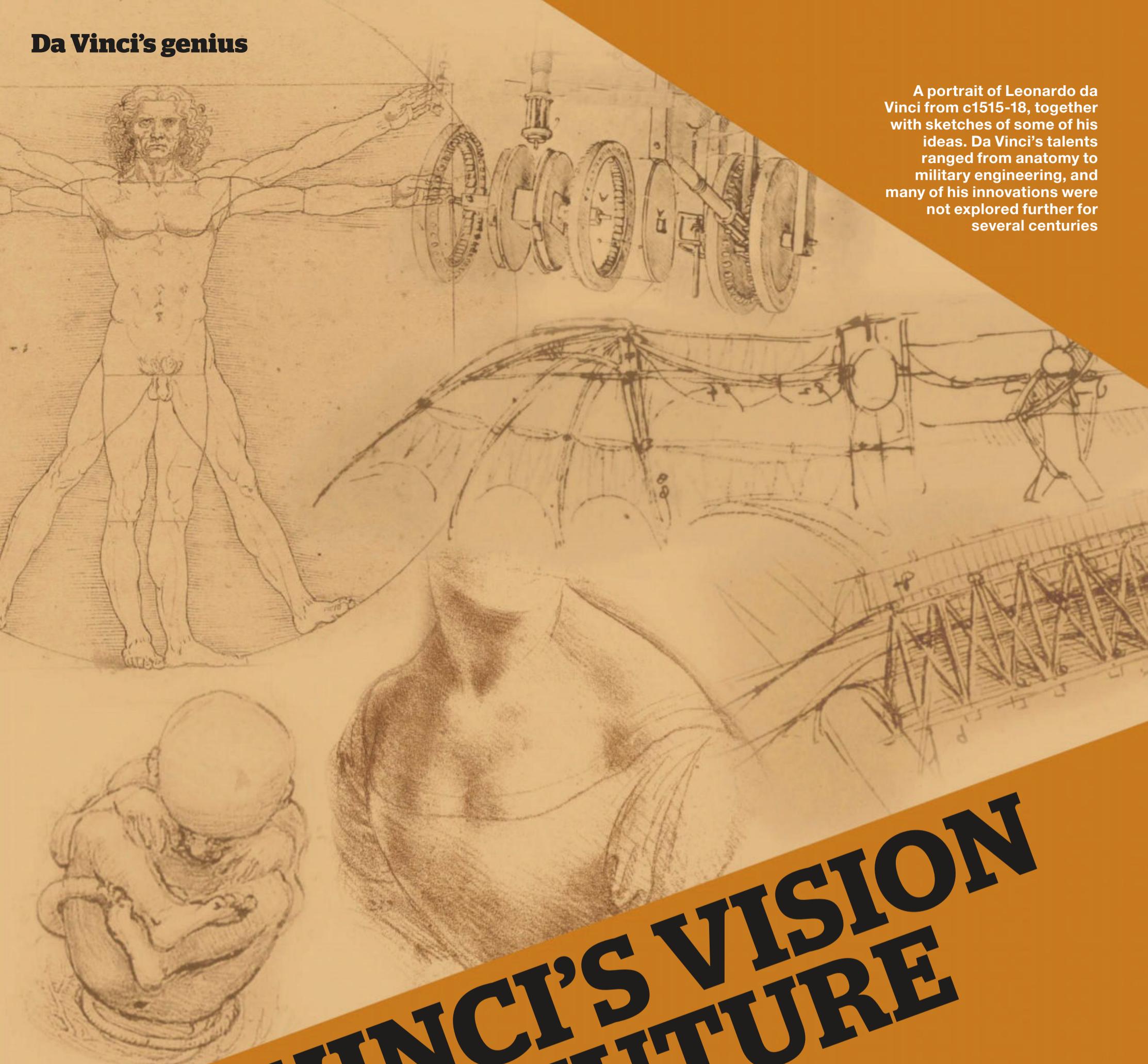


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Da Vinci's genius



A portrait of Leonardo da Vinci from c1515-18, together with sketches of some of his ideas. Da Vinci's talents ranged from anatomy to military engineering, and many of his innovations were not explored further for several centuries

DA VINCI'S VISION OF THE FUTURE

On the 500th anniversary of the artist and inventor's death, **Marina Wallace** explores seven of his most forward-thinking ideas and inventions – from the telescope to the flying machine



LEONARDO DA VINCI A LIFE AND LEGACY

Da Vinci was born in Vinci, Tuscany in 1452, the illegitimate son of a Florentine notary and a young peasant. Little is known of his childhood, but his artistic talent must have been apparent at an early age for, at 14, he was apprenticed to one of the most well-known Florentine workshops of the day: that of painter and sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio.

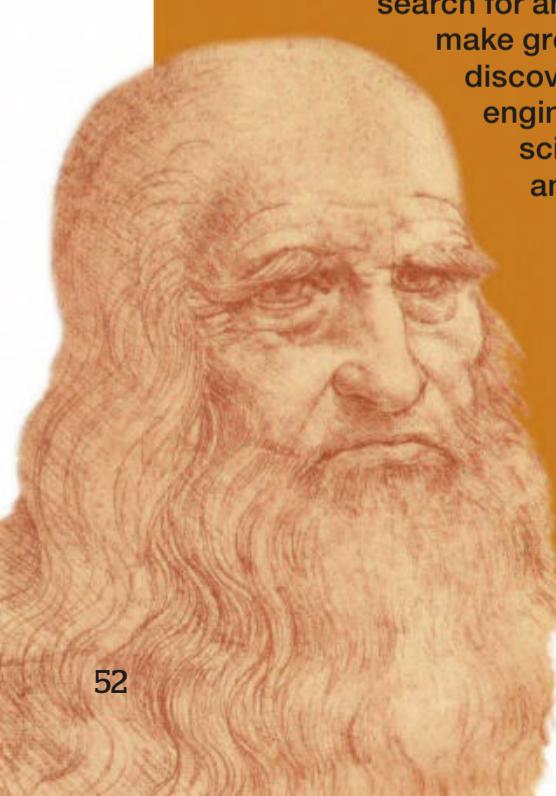
In 1482, now an artist in his own right, da Vinci moved from Florence to Milan in search of new work. There, he began working as a military engineer for Ludovico Sforza, future Duke of Milan, designing many of his famous war inventions. It was also during his time in the city that da Vinci created one of his most famous works, *The Last Supper*.

Da Vinci spent 17 years in Milan, painting, sculpting and recording new inventions and scientific and anatomical observations in a series of notebooks. But in 1499, the French invasion of the city brought his employment with Sforza to an end and da Vinci spent several years travelling around Italy working on a variety of projects. Among these was the *Mona Lisa*, a painting believed to have been started in 1503, and *The Virgin and Child with St Anne* (1510).

Da Vinci spent his final years at the Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise, France, in the employment of the French king, Francis I. He died there, on 2 May 1519, at the age of 67.

After his death, da Vinci's unpublished manuscripts, full of ideas and observations, were first neglected and later dispersed, with many pages disappearing forever. But in the 20th century, scholars and restorers began to recover and interpret what texts survived. Thanks to them, we can now appreciate the activity of one of the most extraordinary minds the world has ever known.

As we will see over the following pages, da Vinci's inquiring mind and relentless search for answers saw him make groundbreaking discoveries in engineering, science, anatomy and industry, often centuries before these ideas became widely accepted and put into practice.



When working on *Madonna of the Yarnwinder*, da Vinci first 'traced' a full-scale preparatory drawing onto the panel

1. WORKS OF ART

The beauty of a brainstorm

Drawing was, for da Vinci, primarily a learning exercise: a type of brainstorming on paper. Always keen to experiment with new techniques, da Vinci would make clay models, cover them with linen dipped in wet clay, and then draw from them. Black and white pigment was then applied with a brush as a way of executing studies in light and shade – known as *chiaroscuro*.

One of da Vinci's most famous works, *Mona Lisa*, exemplifies the *sfumato* technique he is known for, where colours are blurred like smoke to produce softened outlines. In the words of da Vinci himself, "the eye does not know the edge of any body".

Da Vinci was not afraid to adopt unorthodox methods in painting. In his c1498 work *The Last Supper* he rejected traditional fresco techniques of the day (pigment mixed with water and sometimes egg yolk on moist plaster). Instead, he experimented with other

water and oil-based mediums in order to create his masterpiece.

Technical examination of panel paintings, such as his c1501 work *Madonna of the Yarnwinder*, has also revealed that da Vinci used strikingly complex underdrawings in his work. *Spolvero* marks (charcoal dust) have been discovered beneath several of his paintings, which confirms he used a *cartoon* – a full-size preparatory study for a painting transferred onto the panel via a method similar to tracing.

His use of hand- and fingerprints to blend shadows also distinguishes his paintings from those of his contemporaries, and his use of light influenced many artists after him. His unique way of viewing drawing as an investigative technique still influences artists, including Joseph Beuys who, in 1975, produced several conceptual works influenced by da Vinci's manuscripts in the *Codex Madrid* (1490–1505).

2. HUMAN ANATOMY

Casts, chambers and corpses

Throughout his career da Vinci strove for accuracy in his anatomical drawings. Although most of these were based on studies of live subjects, they reveal his knowledge of the underlying structures observed by dissection. Da Vinci acquired a human skull in 1489, and his first documented human dissection was of a 100-year-old man, whose peaceful death he witnessed in a Florentine hospital in 1506.

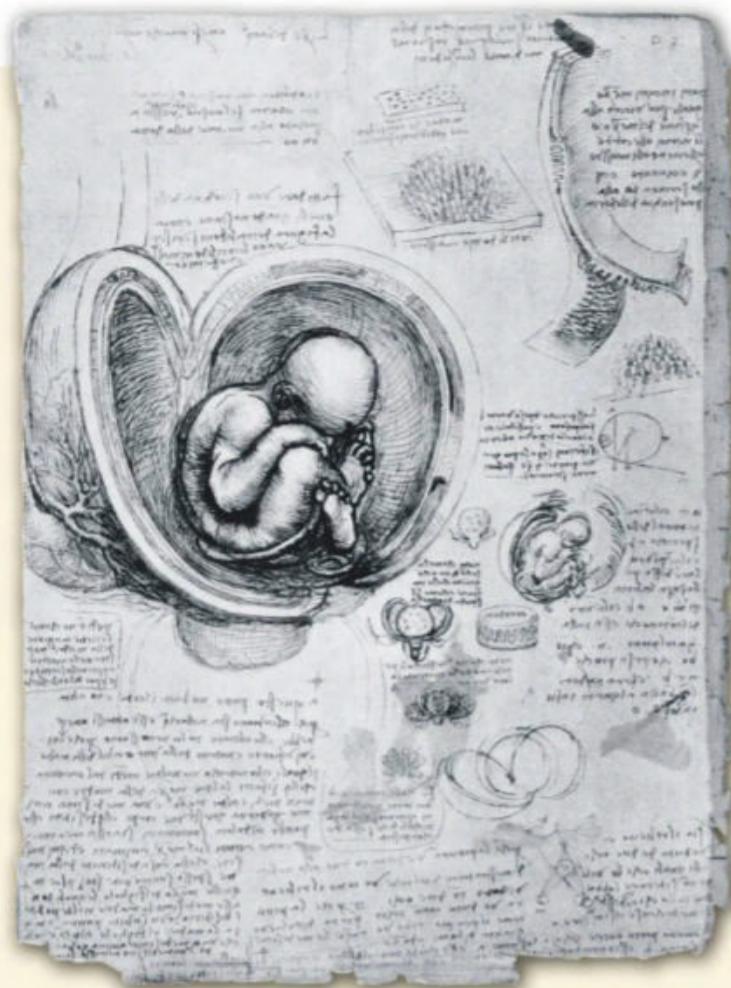
Curious about the structures and functions of the body, da Vinci dissected around 30 corpses in his lifetime.

Human dissection was tightly regulated by the church, which objected to what it saw as desecration of the dead. Nevertheless, da Vinci's dissections were carried out openly in the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence. Among his drawings is an ink and chalk sketch of a baby *in utero*

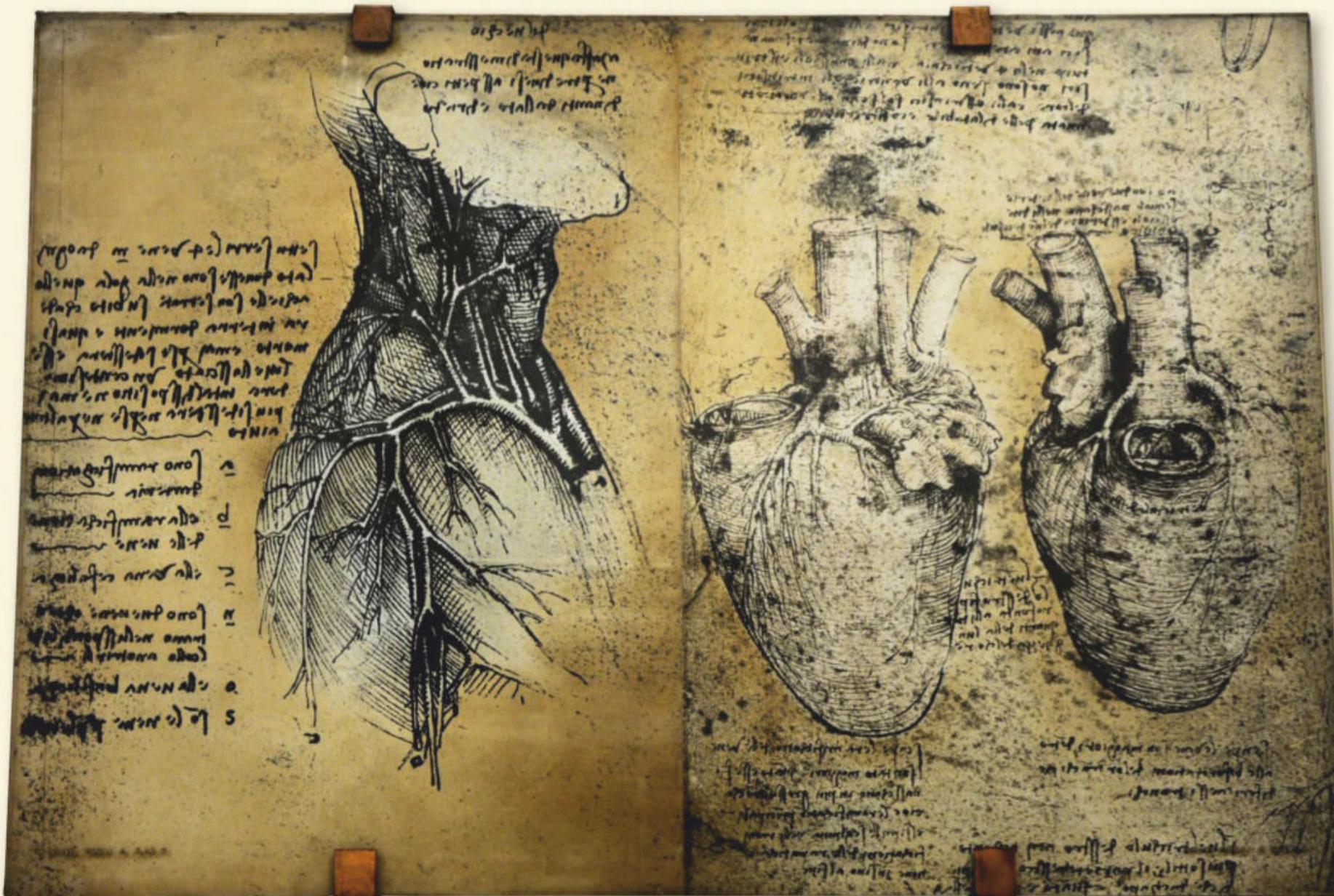
(right), probably made by dissecting a miscarried foetus and a woman who had died in childbirth.

Da Vinci perceived the workings of the human body to be a perfect reflection of engineering and vice versa. In 1508, his studies of hydrodynamics coincided with the study of the aortic valve and the flow of blood to the heart. He annotated instructions for wax casts and glass models of the aorta and recorded experiments with flowing water, using grass seeds to track the flow of 'blood'. Through these experiments he observed that the orifice of a heart's open valve is triangular and that the heart has four chambers.

Da Vinci's anatomical discoveries weren't widely disseminated, and it was another century before the rest of the world began to catch up: William Harvey didn't publish his theories on the circulation of blood until 1628.



Da Vinci's anatomical sketch of a human foetus in the womb, c1510. The artist and inventor performed dissections in order to investigate anatomy and to improve accuracy when drawing people



A da Vinci drawing of the cardiovascular system. The polymath investigated the aortic valve and the flow of blood to the heart, annotating instructions for wax casts and glass models of the aorta. It was, however, another century before a theory on the circulation of the blood was published

3. STUDY OF OPTICS

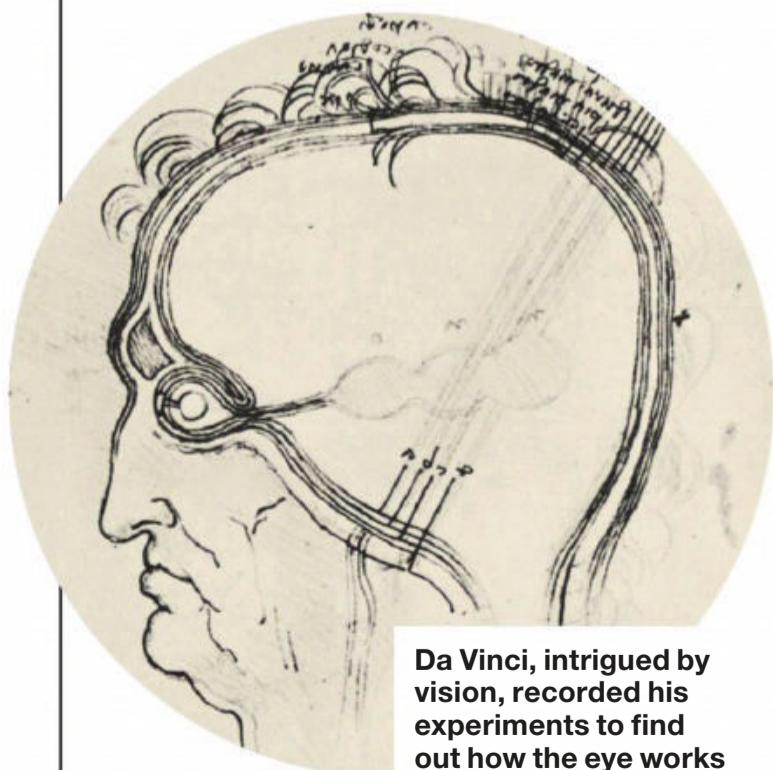
Shedding light on the mystery of sight

A number of da Vinci's manuscripts contain writings on vision, including important studies of optics as well as theories relating to shadow, light and colour. For da Vinci, the eye was the most important of the sense organs: "the window of the soul", as he put it. We now know how the eye works, but in the artist's time, sight was a mystery. To complicate matters further, the eye was a difficult organ to dissect. When cut in to, it collapses and the lens takes on a more spherical shape.

Da Vinci boiled his eye specimens, unknowingly distorting their lenses. After close examination he concluded that the eye was a geometrical body, comprising two concentric spheres: the outer "albugineous sphere", and the inner "vitreous" or "crystalline sphere". At the back of the eye, opposite the pupil, he observed, was an opening into the optic nerve by which images were sent to the *imprensiva* in the brain, where all sensory information was collated.

Leonardo da Vinci's observations on the workings of the eye preceded Johannes Kepler's fundamental studies in the 17th century on the inner working of human retina, convex and concave lenses, and other properties of light and astronomy.

And like Kepler a century later, da Vinci was also fascinated by his observations of celestial bodies. He stated: "The moon is not luminous in itself. It does not shine without the sun." In his notes he includes a reminder to himself to construct glasses through which to see the moon magnified. Although da Vinci never built his telescope – the first example wasn't created until 1608 – the initial idea was his.



Da Vinci, intrigued by vision, recorded his experiments to find out how the eye works



4. MANNED FLIGHT

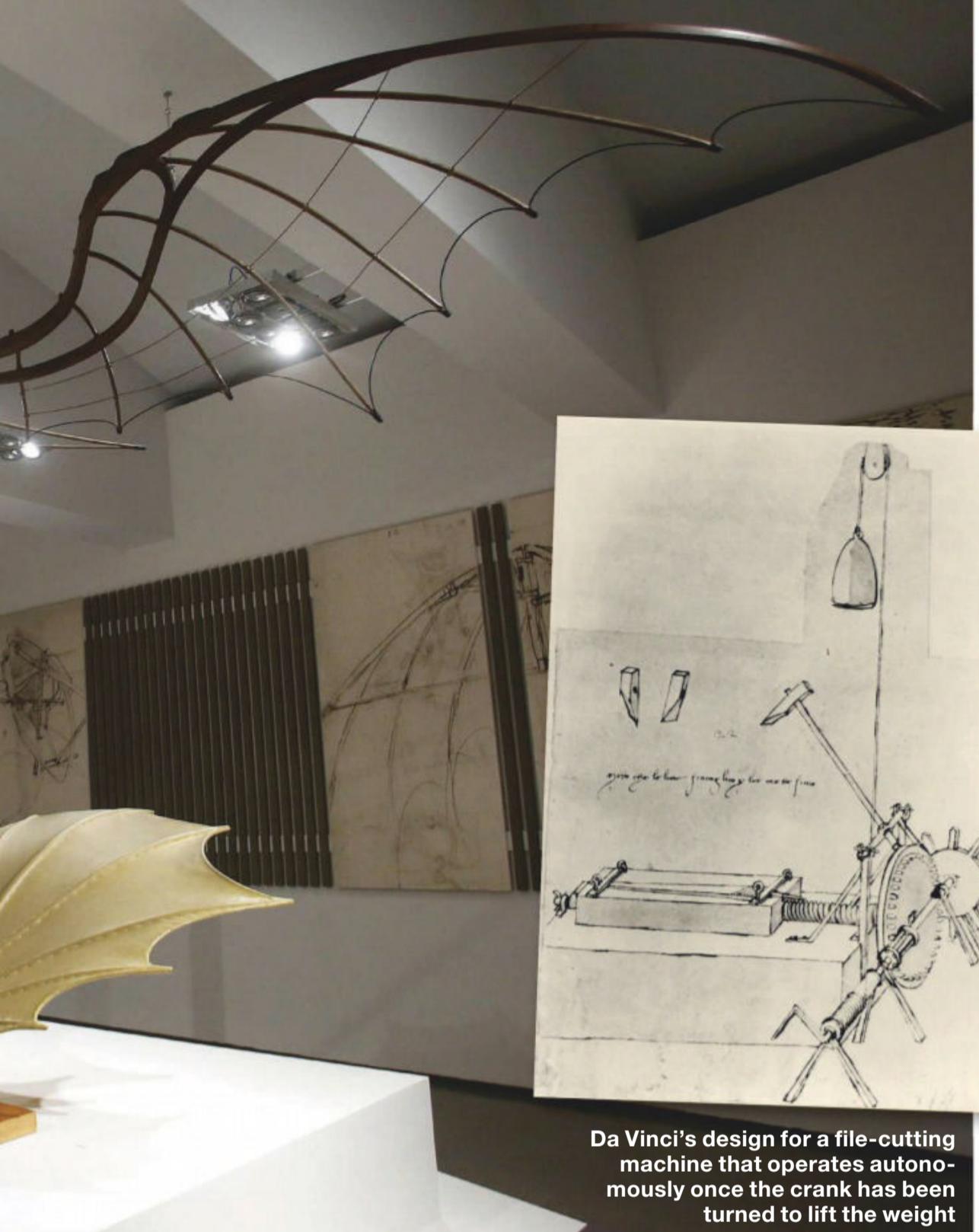
The quest for a flying machine

Da Vinci was fascinated by the phenomenon of flight. He felt that if he could arrive at a full understanding of how birds fly, he would be able to apply this knowledge to constructing a machine that allowed man to take to the skies. He attempted to combine the dynamic potential of the human body with an imitation of natural flight.

In his notes, da Vinci cites bats, kites and other birds as models to emulate, referring to his flying machine as the "great bird". He made attempts at solving the problem of manned flight as early as 1478 and his many studies of the flight of birds and plans for flying machines are contained in his *Codex on the Flight of Birds*, 1505. He explored the mechanism of bird flight in detail, recording how they achieve balanced dynamism through the science of the motions of air.

One of the innovations da Vinci sketched out was an ornithopter, a bird-like system with a prone man operating two wings through foot pedals. For safety reasons he suggested that the machine should be tested over a lake and that a flotation device be placed under the structure to keep it from sinking if it fell into the water.

Da Vinci's flight designs are not complete and most were impractical, like his sketch of an aerial screw design, which has been described as a predecessor of the helicopter. However, his hang glider has since been successfully constructed. After da Vinci, the 17th and 18th centuries witnessed several attempts at man-powered flight. The first rigorous study of the physics of flight was made in the 1840s by Sir George Cayley, who has been called the 'father of aviation'.



Da Vinci's design for a file-cutting machine that operates autonomously once the crank has been turned to lift the weight

5. TECHNICAL DRAWING

Sketching out the industrial age

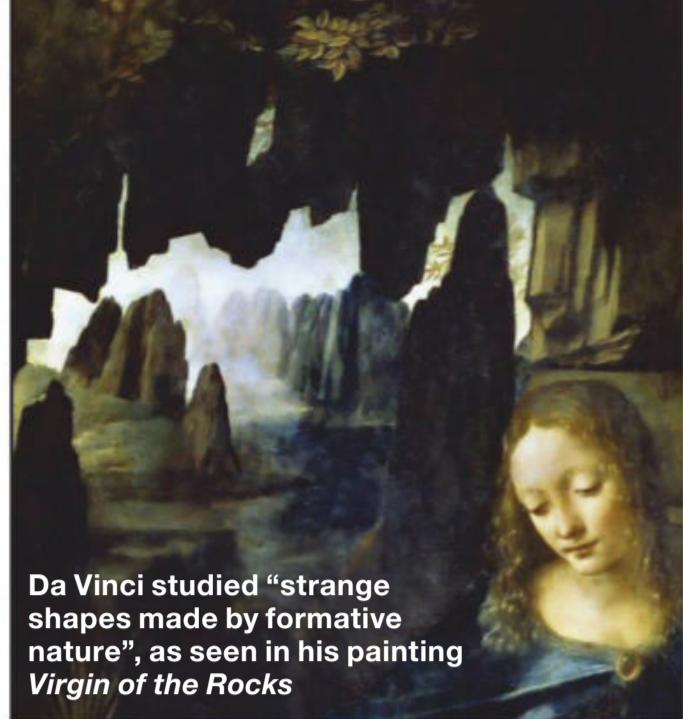
Automation of industrial processes is often seen as a 19th-century concept, but da Vinci's design for a file cutter shows the same idea. The operator turns a crank to raise a weight. After this the machine operates autonomously.

Some of da Vinci's most modern-looking drawings are his studies of basic industrial machines. His best examples are designed to translate simple movement by the operator into a complex set of actions to automate a process. One particularly interesting device was for grinding convex mirrors, while his *Codex Atlanticus* shows a hoist that translates the backward and forward motion of a handle into the rotation of wheels to raise or lower weight. Next to simple drawings are exploded views (showing the order of assembly) to make the mechanism crystal clear.

The *Codex Madrid*, bound volumes with precise drawings concerning

mainly the science of mechanisms, was rediscovered in 1966. Priority is given to the drawings, which are accompanied by a commentary or a caption. The care taken with the layout of each page and the finesse of the drawings indicates they are close to publishable form, either as a presentation manuscript or printed treatises. By showing component parts of machines in a clear fashion, da Vinci pioneered what was to come much later in the industrial age.

Almost all his industrial designs were proposals rather than inventions translated into concrete form. We might wonder how these could have revolutionised manufacturing had they been realised, but the real lesson da Vinci offers the world of science, mechanics, engineering and industry is less in his inventions and more in his highly innovative representational style and brilliantly drawn demonstrations.



Da Vinci studied "strange shapes made by formative nature", as seen in his painting *Virgin of the Rocks*

6. GEOLOGY

The relentless power of the ocean

Before da Vinci, very few scientists studied rocks trying to determine how they formed. The dominant belief about Earth science came from antiquity and Aristotle's idea that rocks evolved over time, seeking to become perfect elements such as gold or mercury – a merging of geology with alchemy.

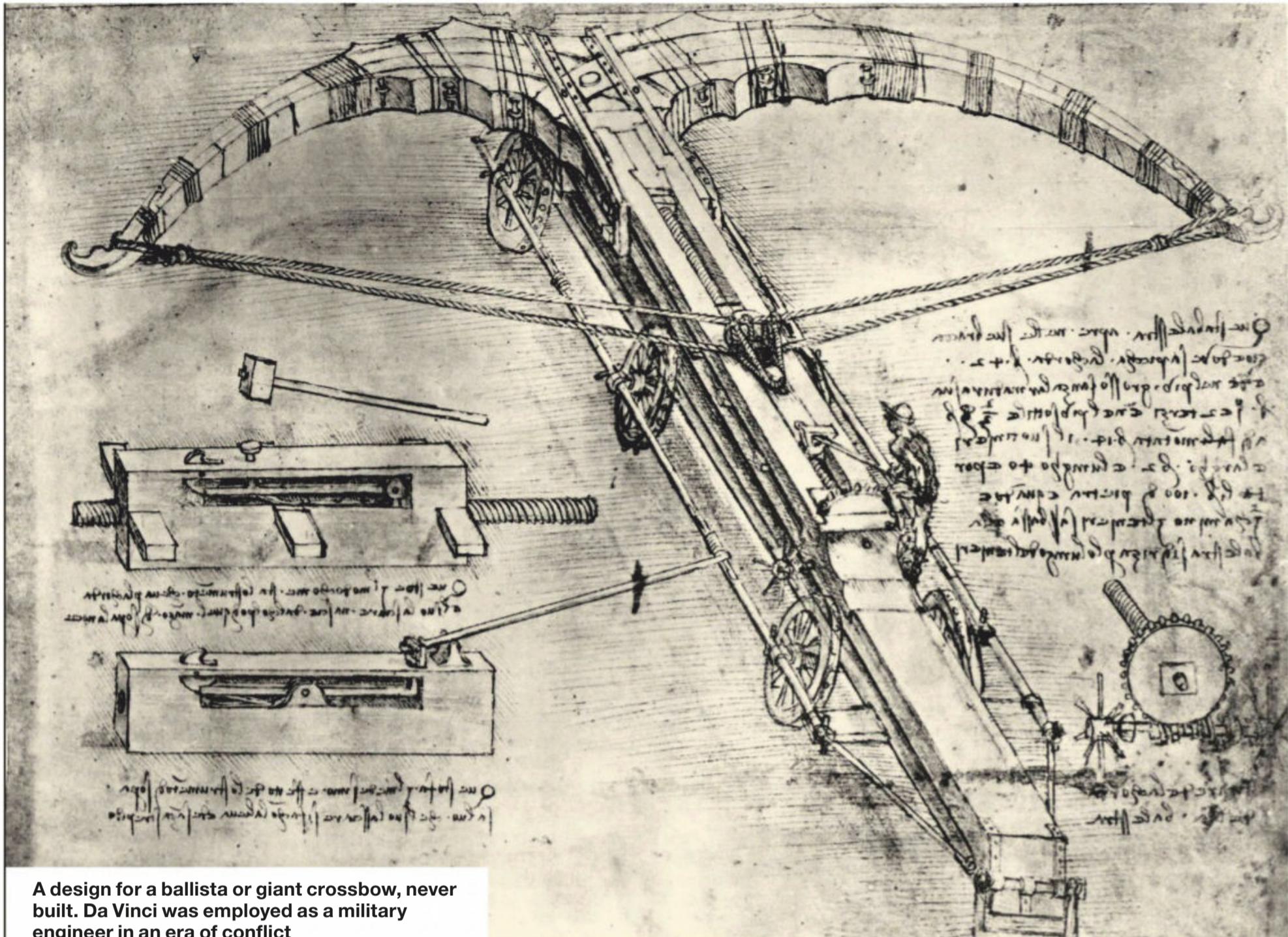
Geological knowledge was based on the assumption that the Earth, surrounded by spheres of water, air and fire, was a divine creation. Deposits of fossils were thought to have been laid down by 'the deluge' (biblical flood) or to be of miraculous origin.

Da Vinci noted that fossils were too heavy to float: they could not have been carried to high ground by flood waters. Observing how in places there were several layers of fossils, he reasoned that such phenomena could not be the result of a single event. He observed layers of fossils in mountains high above sea level, concluding that the landscape was formed by repeated flooding and the erosive powers of water.

He wrote about his observations of rocks: "Drawn by my eager desire, wishing to see the great manifestation of the various strange shapes made by formative nature, I wandered some way among gloomy rocks, coming to the entrance of a great cavern, in front of which I stood for some time, stupefied and incomprehending such a thing." In drawings such as *A Deluge*, and paintings such as the two versions of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, da Vinci captures his sense of mystery and wonder, replacing the divine with observation and physical explanations.

It was not until the 1830s that scientists including Charles Lyell and then Charles Darwin became convinced that the surface of Earth changes over time only slowly and gradually, not by sudden catastrophic events such as the biblical flood.

Da Vinci's genius

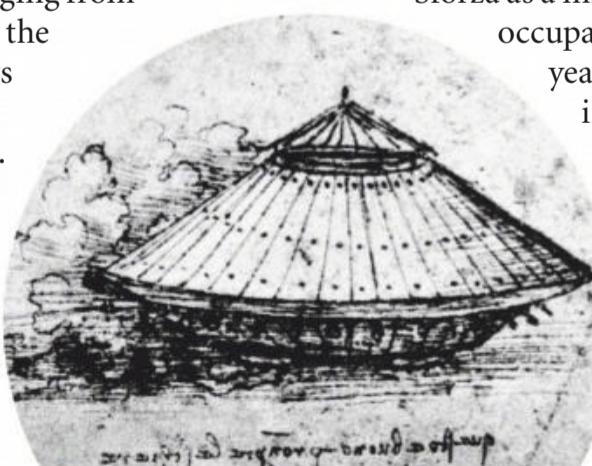


A design for a ballista or giant crossbow, never built. Da Vinci was employed as a military engineer in an era of conflict

7. ENGINEERING

When war was the mother of invention

Da Vinci's extraordinary inventiveness led him to attempt to solve complex technical problems, such as transmitting motion from one plane onto another using intricate arrays of gears, cams, axles and levers. He was the first to design separate components that could be deployed in a variety of devices, ranging from complex units such as the gears for barrel springs and ring bearings for axles to simple hinges. His mechanics included levers, cranes and ball bearings. As we've already noted, he drew such devices with great attention to reality, knowing that drawings needed to be amplified with designs of the individual parts.



A tank-like vehicle among the artist's sketches. He used his drawings for the creative brainstorming of his ideas, often for a patron or client

Da Vinci's genius as an engineer lay in seeing clearly how design must be informed by the mathematical laws of physics rather than just practice. He undertook military, civil, hydraulic, mechanical and architectural engineering, first applying his talents aged 30, when he was employed in Milan by Ludovico

Sforza as a military engineer, an occupation he held for many years. Da Vinci designed instruments for war, including catapults and other weapons, and had ideas for submarines and machine guns.

For Sforza, da Vinci designed several bridges, including a revolving bridge for use by armies on the move. With wheels, a rope-and-pulley system and a counterweight tank for balance, it could be

packed away and transported. Some of his famous designs, such as the 'tank' (left), were not practical devices but technological musings aimed at a patron. His civil engineering projects, meanwhile, included geometry studies and designs of canals and churches with domes.

Da Vinci's innovative attitude about how things work made him a pioneer in what later became the science of mechanics. ■

Marina Wallace was a director of the Universal Leonardo project, which aimed to deepen understanding of da Vinci. Her most recent book is *30-Second Leonardo da Vinci* (Ivy Press, 2018)

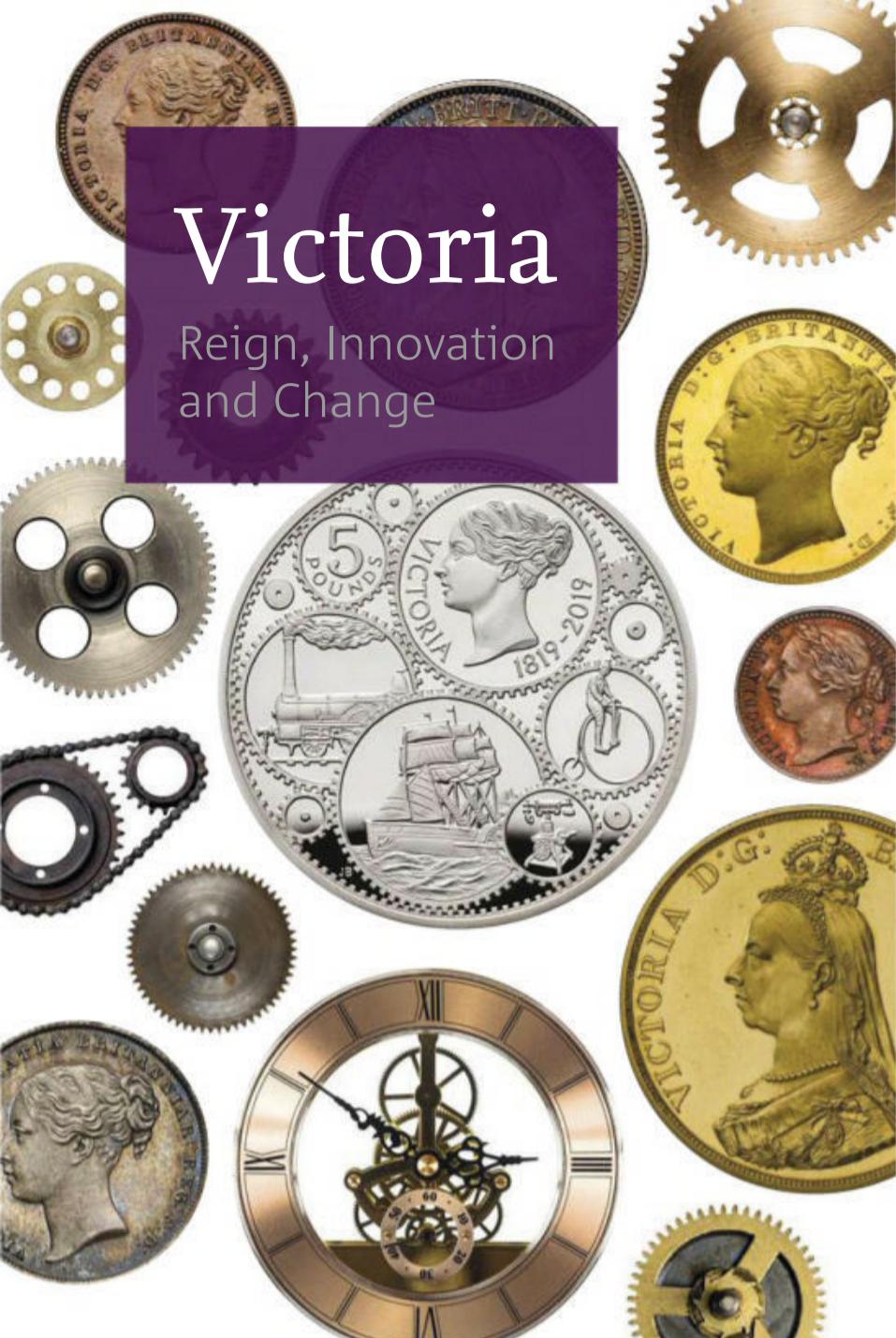
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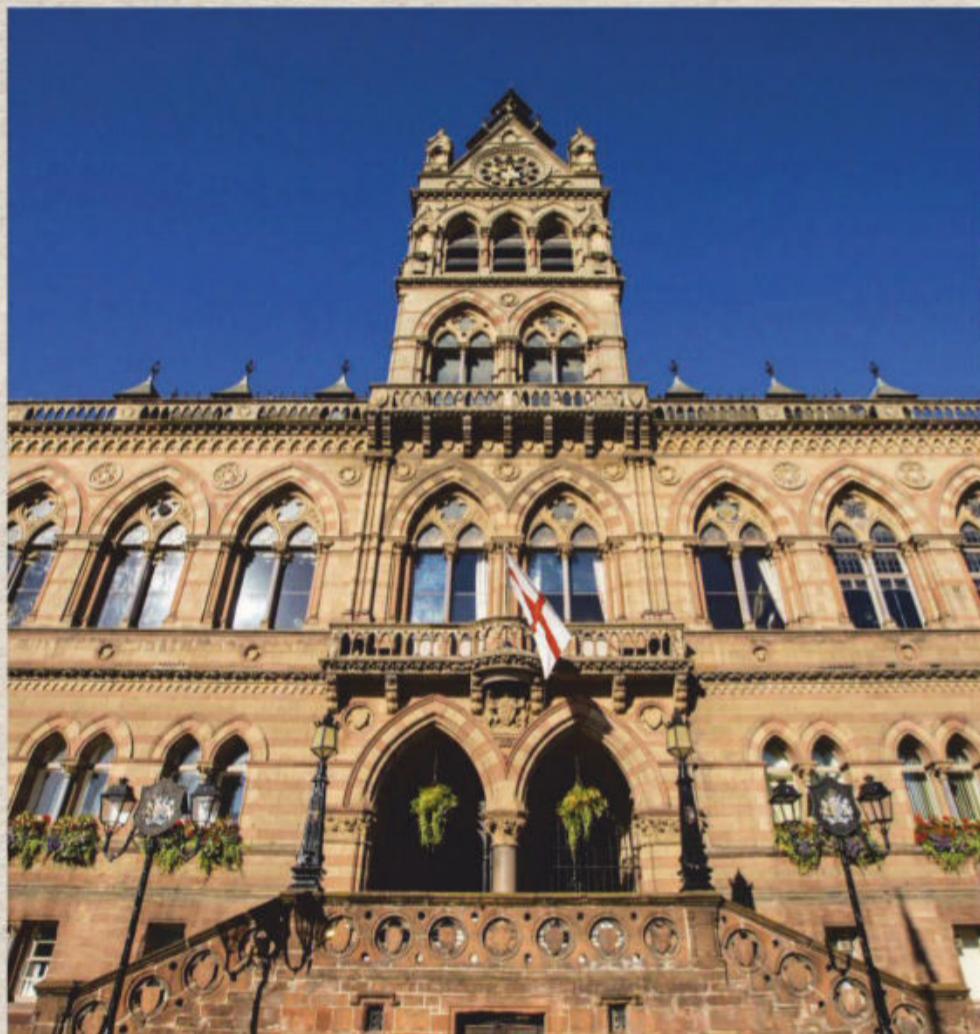
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The motherhood revolution

Of all the changes to sweep the west over the past 400 years, perhaps none have had a greater impact on women's lives than the fall in family sizes.

Sarah Knott tells the story of the great fertility decline, from the large broods of 17th-century America to the one-children families of postwar London

A tender moment
A late 19th or early 20th-century painting entitled *Mother and Child*. As fertility rates fell, sentimental idealisations of mothers and babies developed ➤

How I shall get along when I have got half a dozen or 10 children, I can't devise," fretted the New Jersey colonist Esther Edwards Burr after her child's birth in 1756.

Narcissa Whitman, a pioneer in Oregon a century later, might have recognised these concerns. She knew first-hand the consequences of mothering a large brood. "My dear parents," she wrote in a rare but affectionate missive back to New York in 1845, "I have now a family of 11 children. This makes me feel as if I could not write a letter."

Modern demographers know that, over the past 400 years, fertility rates have changed significantly in Europe and North America. The numbers dropped dramatically from an average of seven or eight children among settlers in 17th and 18th-century North America, or four or five in Britain, to 2.2 or lower in both places in the 20th century. The demographers culled and amassed their numbers mainly from sources including local censuses, family histories, wills, church records, and then, since the 19th century, from national surveys. They call this remarkable historical transformation the fertility transition.

Of all the factors affecting women's experiences of motherhood since the 17th century, surely none has had a greater impact than plunging fertility rates. If there is an overarching story to be told about mothering, the change from larger to smaller families is as close as we might get.

But understanding what these changes may have felt like is tricky. It wasn't easy for a mother to keep a diary or to write a letter – thus leaving a record for us to read now – when there were "half a dozen or 10 children" on hand. Perhaps that is why the history of the fertility transition has, for the most part, faded from view.

Despite this, there can be little doubt that the fall in family sizes triggered a radical change in emphasis – from child bearing to child rearing. Once, a woman expected to bear many babies, her body marked by multiple pregnancies and births. If her infants survived, she mothered an assemblage of children, and her attention was distracted and divided. Seventeenth-century colonial American women typically married in their late teens and gave birth every 18 months to two years – regarded as a sign of God-given prosperity. In England, where economic life was often less certain, women married later and gave birth every two to three years.

Writing in the 1780s, Esther Atlee of Pennsylvania noted her poor mood on being pregnant yet again. "I cannot account for a

glooming which too frequently comes over me," she noted. "If I had some relief in my family affairs... I should be much easier." The pregnancy nudged the number of her children into double figures.

Mary Vial Holyoke, who married into a New England family in 1759, spent the majority of the first 23 years of her married life either pregnant or nursing. Only three of her children survived to adulthood. Mary was a second wife. Her predecessor carried an infant to term but both died within months.

Revolutionary breeding

By the early 19th century, the landscape was changing. Women were increasingly expected to bear just a few children – and to mother them more intensively. Among the middle classes, increasingly sentimental notions of motherhood celebrated tender mother-infant bonds and individual devotion. Nineteenth-century childrearing manuals were a primer in closely attentive parenting. Lydia Sigourney's much-read *Letters to Mothers* opened with a cloying, chatty scene: "You are sitting with your child in your arms. So am I. And I have never been as happy before. Have you?"

So what drove these changes? Why were millions of women having fewer children – and revelling in the greater freedom it afforded them? The transformation was, to a large extent, the product of grand socio-political forces that swept the west from the 18th century. "Do not you, my friend," Susanna Hopkins wrote in a letter, "think the person very contracted [small-minded] in his notions who would have us to be nothing more than domesticated animals?" The young Marylander was writing at the beginning of the transformation, in the late 18th-century revolutionary United States.

Hopkins recoiled from older ways that she thought treated women like breeding livestock. The fertility transition began in exactly her generation, when some women had the opportunity to apply the revolution's radical message of liberty and independence to their personal lives. Sarah Logan Fisher, a Quaker merchant's wife, remarked on a contemporary's "sixth child before she is 29". The implication was clear: this was too many, too early, and too fast.

The rejection of older ways, the sense of enacting new possibilities, seemed as radical and profound as throwing off monarchy. Frenchwomen's demographic history followed a similarly revolutionary path. Without a revolution of its own, Britain only followed suit in reducing family size by the later 19th century, a change most often associated with industrialisation.

The fertility transition also touched the lives of enslaved black southerners who, in the



ABOVE: *Lady Cockburn and Her Three Eldest Sons* (1773). Aristocratic women had themselves painted as warm, affectionate mothers

RIGHT: An enslaved family, c1850. "Reproduction was one of the terrible burdens of enslavement," writes Sarah Knott

BELLOW: Growing sentimentality: a mother and child pictured in the late 19th century





The decline in family sizes was accompanied by an increasing emphasis on family planning

mid-19th-century United States, began to limit their fertility on winning freedom in the American Civil War. Reproduction had been one of the terrible burdens of enslavement, adding to a slaveholder's stock and a slave woman's duress. "You better have the white folks some babies if you didn't want to be sold," recalled Alice Douglass, a former Tennessee slave.

Infertile women had often been sold away, but now fertility rates began to fall as freedom became possible for the first time. In 1880s Mobile, Alabama, Caroline Bowers nursed a single infant. Her mother, Lucrecia Perryman, had given birth to five children living under enslavement. Bowers now worked as a laundress and a midwife, activities that let the extended family keep well away from former slave-owners.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the decline in family sizes was accompanied by an increasing emphasis on family planning, long before the advent of the Pill in the 1960s. A strong orientation to the future, requiring self-control on the part of husbands and wives, replaced older notions of God and fate. Plan your children ran the new logic, consider their spacing, assess what you can afford.

Abstinence, and the use of abortifacient herbs, were the main means of regulating pregnancy. Rue and savin were used on both sides of the Atlantic, as was rosemary. Seneca snakeroot, a native remedy, was gathered in the American South and shipped to sellers both in England and in northern American cities. Turpentine was popular in African-American communities. In cities, syringes and rubber goods might be bought, if you knew where to shop.

Reshaping the life cycle

Fewer pregnancies brought a radical reshaping of a woman's life cycle. It meant a shift from continual maternity, layered over with grand-mothering, to just a short number of years being pregnant and caring for children. Once, in places like 17th-century Boston or 18th-century Cornwall, hands-on motherhood had been a permanent and defining





An American pioneer family, c1870. By now, across swathes of Europe and the US, large families were becoming the exception to the rule

In the west, fertility rates remained highest where women had least knowledge or power

adult status. "This is getting to be my normal condition," wrote one woman, who had nine children in 16 years. But by the 20th century, caring for children had become more like a short moment in many women's life cycle. Sociologists like Richard Titmuss noticed that women might expect to live another 40 years after raising their children. In 1952, he remarked on their new opportunities for an "emotionally satisfying and independent life", new outlets after the "responsibilities of child upbringing".

These "emotionally satisfying" outlets weren't available to everyone: fertility rates remained high where women had least knowledge or power. Isolated homesteading women in north-west Colorado, an early 20th-century frontier, continued to produce massive families. When asked about birthing as many as 12 children, the comment decades later was often: no big deal. White tenant farmers of North Carolina had on average six children. A sociologist remarked on the

"traditional pattern of the glory" of having children as well as "the actual or imagined value of a large number of children". In the 1860s, the Cree community living on the North American prairies saw a *rise* in fertility rates – perhaps because of increasingly sedentary lifestyles as the buffalo hunt years came to an end. As the old Cree story went, "we never had more children than we could grab and run with if there was a battle".

But these were isolated examples in a wider story of greater education, growing opportunities, improving infrastructure – and declining fertility. In 1930s London, a young woman like sewing machinist Doris Hanslow could associate having fewer children with other recent domestic improvements like hot running water or electric lighting or municipal housing. Her mother had eight children in turn-of-the-century Bermondsey. Like other working-class London women of her generation, Doris would have fewer, just two. Large families were decreasingly visible. By the 1940s, less than 10 per cent of British women had five or more children. Asked about ideal family size, a woman interviewed on London's streets just after the Second World War answered: "One's enough. You've got to bring them up decent, haven't you."

Stout, teeming bodies

There were many reasons why a woman would relish having a large family: quiet pride in a stout, teeming body; the pleasing generosity of gathering up a group of children; or the reappearance in a newborn

of the looks of a now-grown child. A crop, a little flock, a parcel of children: these were all phrases to describe large families. But the fertility transition opened up a whole new world of opportunities to millions of women across the west. It offered them far greater control over their bodies and their lives.

The story of three generations of Margaret Bowen's family express this transformation in miniature. Bowen's grandmother had 12 children; her parents had four in total, carefully spaced three years apart. Margaret herself had a single child, and time to reflect and record. Living in Williamsport in central Pennsylvania in 1855, she mused, of her grandmother: "Having the care of a large family... her sphere of operation was limited."

Some decades later, probably around 1888, a descendant of colonist Hannah Callender expressed herself somewhat more briskly. Next to the "large family of promising children" celebrated in one of Callender's letters, she simply pencilled three exclamation marks in the margin. The fertility transition had made her ancestor's sentiments seem entirely strange and unusual. ■

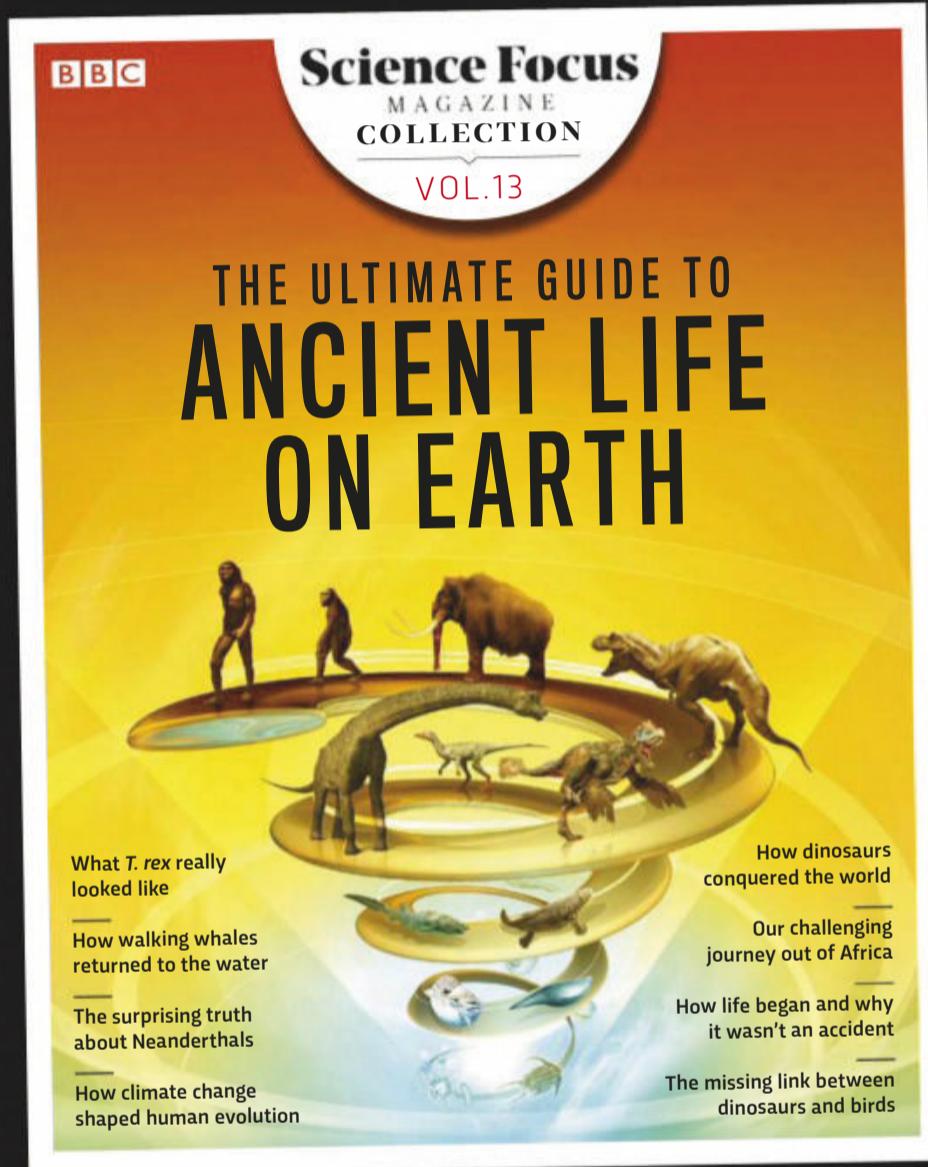
Sarah Knott is associate professor of history at Indiana University. She is the author of *Mother: An Unconventional History* (Penguin Viking, 2019)

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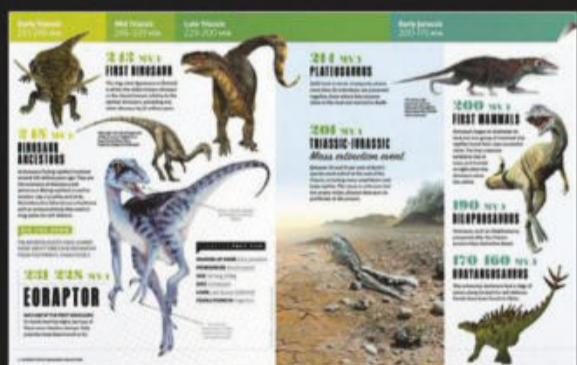
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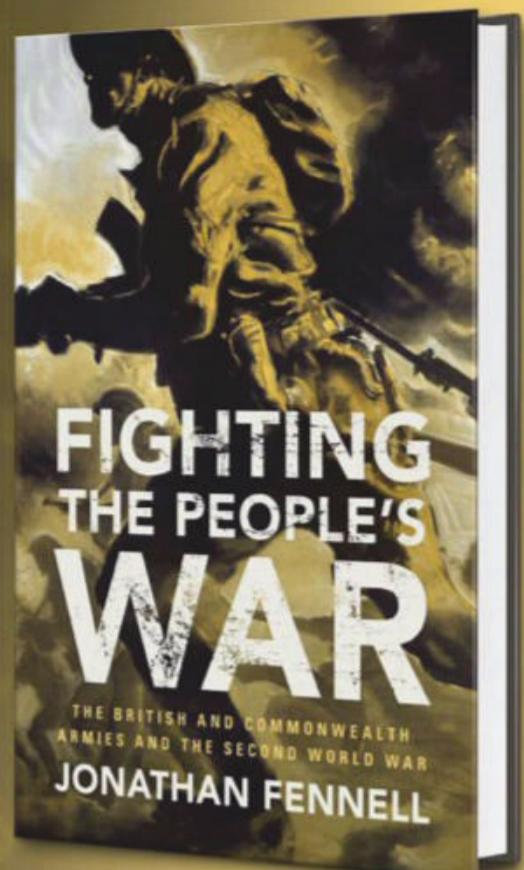
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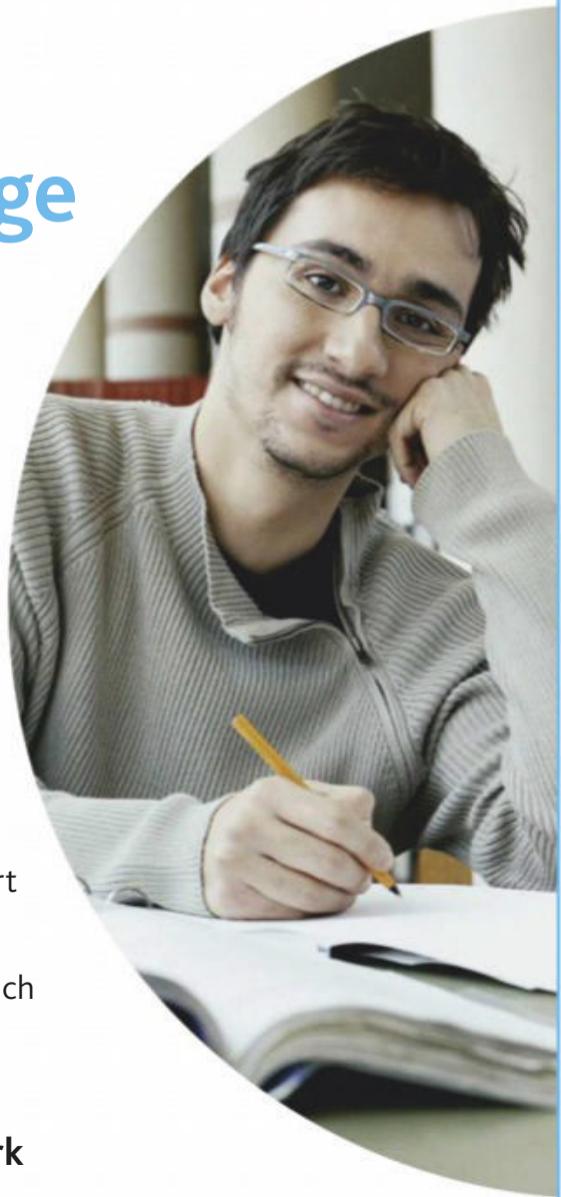
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Experts discuss and review the latest history releases

BOOKS



Anita Anand, photographed in London. "My grandfather was in Amritsar on the day of the massacre. This story has been woven into my DNA," she says

Photography by Alastair Levy

INTERVIEW / ANITA ANAND

"Singh hoped that he would be the catalyst for a revolution"

Anita Anand talks to **Ellie Cawthorne** about her new book, which charts a 20-year quest for revenge following one of the British empire's worst atrocities

PROFILE ANITA ANAND

A political journalist and broadcaster, Anita Anand has presented various BBC programmes including Radio 4's *Any Answers?*. She is the author of *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary* and *Koh-i-Noor: The History of the World's Most Infamous Diamond* (with William Dalrymple)

IN CONTEXT

In 1919, British troops led by Reginald Dyer opened fire on unarmed Indian civilians at Jallianwala Bagh gardens in Amritsar, leaving hundreds dead. The lieutenant governor of Punjab at the time, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, defended the actions of his troops as necessary to prevent rebellion. More than 20 years later, in 1940, an Indian nationalist named Udham Singh shot O'Dwyer in London – citing the massacre as his motivation. After a trial, he was hanged at Pentonville prison. Anita Anand's latest book tells the story of Singh's quest for vengeance.

How did you first come across this globe-spanning story of murder and revenge?

My grandfather was in Amritsar on the day of the massacre, in the Jallianwala Bagh gardens. In a quirk of fate, he left minutes before the firing started, but friends of his were killed. It would be much more romantic if I said my grandfather was some great freedom fighter. But he was just a 17-year-old kid who had been sent by his dad to do a deal for some second-hand sewing machines.

Nevertheless, what happened that day destroyed my grandfather's life in many ways – he lived with survivor's guilt for the rest of his days. He went blind very early in life and whenever anyone tried to sympathise with him, he would say: "Don't. God granted me my life that day, so it's only right that he should take the light from my eyes." That has been woven into my DNA. I was brought up to fear the names Dyer and O'Dwyer down to my bone marrow: they were like bogeymen to me.

According to legend, another young man, just a little older than my grandfather, was also in the garden that day – a man called Udham Singh. Some stories say that he was forced to stay in that garden all night as people bled out around him. He is said to have grabbed a clod of blood-soaked earth and vowed that, no matter how long it took, he was going to kill those responsible. Singh was a barely educated low-caste orphan, so this was a really big vow for him to make. As it transpired, it would take him 20 years before, one day in 1940, he would swagger into a hall in Westminster and shoot the former lieutenant-governor of Punjab through the heart at point-blank range.

Tell us more about the massacre that triggered Singh's quest for vengeance.

The witnesses' accounts are hideous. They report how General Reginald Dyer ordered his men to walk in and immediately open fire. There was no cover in the garden, and Dyer told his men to aim into the crowds where they were thickest. This meant that bodies piled up near the perimeter wall, as people desperately tried to escape, but couldn't because the walls were too high. Witnesses described watching their friends and neighbours being shot like fish in a barrel. They had to endure 10 minutes of firing. Just imagine that: 10 whole minutes of sustained firing at unarmed civilians. Witnesses report that the youngest victim was six months old, one of the oldest was 80.

The incident itself was absolutely horrendous, but what happened during the long night and the days that followed was arguably just as damaging. A curfew was declared that night, and no medical aid was allowed in to those who'd been shot. Dyer also introduced restrictions intended to punish the population by humiliation. He placed a crawling order over one lane in Amritsar, meaning that everyone who needed to pass through was forced to do so on their bellies, crawling like insects.

How did the massacre impact on calls for Indian independence?

The British had fears of another mutiny like 1857, where Europeans were killed in great numbers. So at first, the official line that went out from Punjab was that Dyer had done a really important thing – he had quelled a rebellion, and stopped terrible violence from spiralling out of control.

But when stories of the massacre and the terrible humiliations that followed began to spread, it turned Indians against the British, and demands for freedom grew ever louder. This was the point when Gandhi accepted there was no chance of sharing power with the British. After Amritsar, the independ-

He vowed that, no matter how long it took, he was going to kill those responsible

ence movement gathered an inexorable momentum – it simply could not be stopped.

Much of Udham Singh's life story is shrouded in mystery and legend, but what do we know about him for sure?

Yes, even the fact of whether he was actually at the massacre is up for debate. Some insist that he was. Other accounts argue that he wasn't there at all and have written him off as a Walter Mitty-type character who just fastened himself on to a noble cause. And it was this noble intention that eventually led him to do something which is ignoble – to murder an old man in cold blood.

But I believe in something between those two ideas. We do know that by the time of the massacre in 1919, Udham Singh was involved with the independence movement as a low-level pamphleteer. He was spreading leaflets for the non-violent resistance, extolling people to stand up for their rights, but not to hurt people. So the most banal explanation – which probably means it's the most credible – is that he wasn't at the massacre himself, but had probably handed out pamphlets encouraging people to turn up that day, and was haunted by guilt about having sent people to die in the garden. It was probably this that drove him to become obsessed with revenge.

Reconstructing Singh's life after the massacre was one of the most difficult bits of investigative journalism I've ever taken on. We know that he worked on the east African railways, on what was called the Lunatic Line. It was here that Singh met many more disaffected Indians and got plugged into the Ghadar movement [a violent Indian revolutionary organisation]. Back home, he was just one of many faceless orphans, but in east Africa, the pool was smaller and he rose to the top.

He later headed to California, the Ghadar headquarters, where he worked as a driver and married a Mexican woman. Indian men were not allowed to own property in California, so there was a trend of Indian men marrying Mexican women, buying property in their name and then abandoning them, which is what Udham seems to have done. I always think of him as a Talented Mr Ripley sort of character. He would take anything and everything from people along the way and discard them when they were no longer useful to him.



ABOVE: A depiction of the 1919 Amritsar massacre. Anita Anand's new book charts the aftershock of the event – a fallout that lasted several decades
LEFT: The Daily Mirror reports on the murder of Michael O'Dwyer – the former governor of Punjab – by vengeance-seeking assassin Uddham Singh

His ultimate aim was to get to England and lie in situ as a sleeper assassin. And how did he manage that? By falling in with the Soviet Comintern organisation, which had talked openly about using Indians to spread revolution.

In many ways, Singh's life is a classic story of radicalisation. He was a dispossessed, angry young man, and angry young men are fodder for those with greater designs. There was a great deal of international Machiavellianism going on which enabled Singh to work his way from India, through America, eastern Europe and Russia to end up committing an assassination in the heart of Westminster. I think he did it on his own cognisance, but who put the gun in his hand and who gave him the motivation to shoot? Those are interesting questions which I think are still relevant today.

Did the assassination fuel the independence movement or was it simply the fulfilment of a personal vendetta?

I don't believe Singh was a fantasist, but he certainly had an extraordinary belief in his own importance. He hoped he would be the catalyst for a revolution; by striking at the very heart of the British establishment he wanted to inspire other Indians to rise up. The moniker he chose when he was arrested – Mohammed Singh Azad – is really important. Mohammed is a Muslim name, Singh is Sikh, and Azad means freedom. His message was crystal clear: "Just read my

name and know why I did this."

However, his actions were massively out of step with the Indian Congress leadership. Gandhi and Nehru were taking great pains to argue that Indians were not savages and could be trusted to govern themselves. So they completely washed their hands of him. But while Singh may not have sparked a revolution, the sentiment of what he did that day percolated down through Indian society, making it even more untenable for the British to stay.

How is Singh remembered in India?

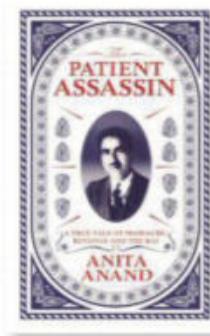
After the British left India, it was almost as if there was now permission to celebrate those who used violence in the fight for freedom. Uddham Singh is one of that pantheon of heroes – seen as the avenging angel for a massacre that is still pretty much an open wound in the north Indian psyche.

In the 1970s, with some unbelievably agile diplomatic footwork, Indira Gandhi got Singh disinterred from Pentonville and had him returned to India with a hero's welcome. His body was toured around Punjab, and people lined the streets, weeping and crying out his name. His ashes were even symbolically dispersed among Hindu, Muslim and Sikh shrines. There were stamps with his face on, and there are streets in Punjab that carry his name. On Martyrs' Day, people light candles in front of his image garlanded with marigolds. There are even Bollywood movies about him.

There have been calls for Britain to officially apologise for the Amritsar massacre. What's your view on that?

Let me give you two distinct answers. From a dispassionate political standpoint, post-Brexit Britain will be looking to forge closer ties with places like India. The massacre remains an open wound in India's psyche, and it would undoubtedly be helpful to make that wound less painful. David Cameron referred to what happened as "monstrous" when he visited the site back in 2013, so it's not a great reach to say we're sorry. It's a small thing which I think could ease a lot of pain.

Personally however, my answer would be different. I recently met with a descendant of General Dyer. She came to my house, we talked for hours and I liked her very much. She actually asked me whether I wanted her to apologise. But I found that, when sat face-to-face with her, I didn't, because it wasn't for her to apologise. However it is for her to understand – and to grieve, as I do, for the innocent. Right now she feels he just did his duty. That's hard for me to hear. To me, understanding and acceptance are more important than apologies and revenge.



The Patient Assassin
by Anita Anand (Simon & Schuster, 384 pages, £20)

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A new biography charts the life of Sultan Saladin, one of the most mythologised leaders of the medieval world

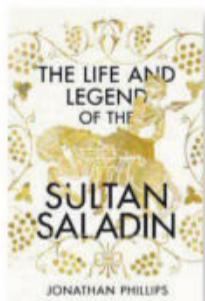
Man behind the myth

HELEN NICHOLSON enjoys an informative introduction to one of the Islamic world's most celebrated historical figures

The Life and Legend of the Sultan Saladin

by Jonathan Phillips

Bodley Head, 496 pages, £25



Few historical figures are so widely known and admired as Saladin (1137–93), sultan of Egypt and Syria, renowned among Muslims and Christians, both in his own time and in the modern day, for his piety, generosity and mercy. Ever since the Middle Ages, Saladin's life and deeds – and especially his fictional encounter with Richard the Lionheart during the Third Crusade – have been celebrated in art and literature, and

explored in historical scholarship. Although he spent far more of his life fighting rival Muslims than Christians, it is for his conquest of the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187 that he is best remembered.

Jonathan Phillips' new biography of Saladin provides a wide-ranging account of the man and his world. After setting the scene with a glimpse of Saladin's image in the modern Islamic world, he describes the Middle East into which the leader was born, with its battling warlords, multiple ethnicities and religions, great cities and prosperity. Drawing on a range of Muslim and Christian contemporary and near-contemporary accounts, Phillips produces an absorbing, readable narrative, introducing many



aspects of Saladin's career that will be unfamiliar to the bulk of his readers.

Before meeting Saladin, we are introduced to the ruthless Zengi of Mosul and his pious – although equally ruthless – son Nur ad-Din, whose employment of the Ayyubid dynasty (to which Saladin belonged) enabled their rise to power. We follow Saladin's career through the fortuitous capture of Egypt and takeover in Damascus, after Nur ad-Din's death, through to his conquest of Aleppo and peace with the ruler of Mosul. Yet Saladin's first 50 years (including the conquest of Egypt and Damascus, and the developing war with the Franks) occupy less than half of the book. Meanwhile, a third of the volume concentrates on the crucial years of the conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade (1187–1192), which created Saladin's posthumous reputation.

Phillips describes a Saladin who will be familiar to many readers: generous, cultured, merciful, pious, and a most effective general. He also describes many aspects of the culture of Saladin's world which may be less familiar, such as the importance of poetry in entertainment, communication and protest.

Some aspects of Saladin's career may also come as a surprise to readers. After taking over Egypt, he massacred the black regiments of the Egyptian army who threatened to ally with the Franks against him, removed the Shia caliph of Egypt, and sold off the Fatimid royal library in Cairo. Contrary to his modern reputation for tolerance, he dismissed the Jews and Coptic Christians in government service in Egypt. And despite his reputation for austerity, he enjoyed a lavish party (a passing reference from Saladin's judge and biographer, Beha ad-Din ibn Shaddad, tells us that he drank wine during his

Phillips describes Saladin as generous, cultured, merciful, pious and a most effective general

**COMING SOON...**

"Next month we'll be speaking to the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jared Diamond about his new book, *Upheaval: Turning Points for Nations in Crisis*. Plus, we'll have historians' reviews of new tomes on slave rebellions, Socrates and women in the 1960s."

Ellie Cawthorne, staff writer

early career.) Furthermore, although he is known for honest dealing, he was accused of poisoning a would-be usurper in Damascus.

While the sultan's military campaigns were generally successful, he also experienced some failures. The Franks defeated him at Montgisard in 1177, and in 1191 he failed to take the initiative in negotiating terms of surrender for the beleaguered Muslim defenders of the city of Acre.

There are some inevitable gaps in the story – Phillips points out that we know disappointingly little about the women in Saladin's life, especially those who bore his children.

The final fifth of the book considers

Despite his modern reputation for honest dealing, Saladin was accused of poisoning a would-be usurper

Saladin's 'afterlife': the development of his reputation in Europe and the Middle East. Phillips shows that, contrary to claims by some recent historians, the sultan has never been forgotten in the near east, but was commemorated in histories, poetry and popular memory throughout the medieval and early modern period. By the 19th century, politics, culture and scholarship had come together to form the modern image of Saladin as the victorious champion of Islam against the west.

This is an excellent introduction to the life of Saladin by a scholar who is respected around the world for his work on the sultan and the crusades. It is not intended as a definitive study, but readers who wish to explore the debates in more detail will find the meticulous references and full bibliography an invaluable guide to wider reading. ■

Helen Nicholson is professor of medieval history at Cardiff University, specialising in military religious orders of the Middle Ages

Through a memsahib's eyes

GRÁINNE GOODWIN is absorbed and intrigued by the experiences of British women in colonial India

She-Merchants, Buccaneers & Gentlewomen: British Women in India 1600-1900

by Katie Hickman

Virago, 400 pages, £20



Maud Diver opens her 1909 apologia on *The Englishwoman in India* by noting that no pen – not even that of Kipling or Mrs Steel – could capture the experiences of this mysterious, multifaceted and much-maligned figure. Diver would be both impressed and heartened by Katie Hickman's endeavour to reveal the lives of British women in India from 1600 to 1900.

As Hickman admits, the stereotype of the languid and frivolous *memsahib* has had incredible endurance in popular perceptions of British women's encounters in India. Variations on the *memsahib* theme have dismissed women as *nabobinas*, husband-hunting members of the 'fishing fleet', and birds of passage. While there is plenty in Hickman's book to substantiate elements of these caricatures, she challenges the supposed homogeneity of British women's lived experience in India. From love affairs to besiegement, childbirth to millinery, bereavement to entrepreneurship, the book covers the whole panoply of what life offered and threw at these women.

Hickman weaves their histories into the sociocultural and political changes wrought first by the East India Company



and then the Raj. In so doing, the women are grounded not only in their historical context in India, but also prevailing trends in metropolitan Britain. The book takes a chronological approach, and one of its great strengths is the attention devoted to women's encounters during the first centuries of contact – a period often neglected in favour of the high noon of the Raj after 1857.

Although women from refreshingly diverse social backgrounds are considered, the female constituency Hickman refers to are relatively elite. That said, unknown and marginal women do feature alongside more recognisable female figures of Anglo-Indian history. One example is the ambitious 'she-merchant' Mrs Hudson, who conducted a healthy trade in cloth and returned to England a wealthy woman in 1619. Much space is given to the indomitable and opinionated Eliza Fay, who survived bandits, being taken as a war captive, marital failure and bankruptcy, none of which prevented her from returning to India on two further occasions.

Hickman is certainly celebratory about the endeavours of such women, which perhaps leaves a faint scent of imperial nostalgia. Those expecting a full engagement with the postcolonial and feminist criticisms levelled at British women in India will be disappointed. But the book is enlightening and highly readable. Hickman has an excellent eye for a story, and the lives she recounts were so intrepid and epic that some would not seem amiss in a work of fiction. The book bristles with life and allows the reader to view female British experience in India as one of enchantment, loathing, escape, bewilderment and opportunity. ■

Gráinne Goodwin is a senior lecturer in history at Leeds Beckett University

A European school mistress seated among her pupils at a school in Mumbai, 1873



Hugo van der Goes' 15th-century painting shows Adam and Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden

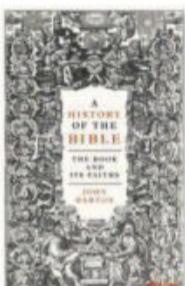
One book, many readings

JAMES CARLETON PAGET admires an accessible study of the Bible, its context and the many differing interpretations of its messages

A History of the Bible

by John Barton

Allen Lane, 512 pages, £25



The appearance of this strikingly accessible yet wonderfully erudite volume will be welcomed by many. Its author, John Barton, a retired professor of biblical studies from Oxford

University, discusses an array of significant topics, including the content of the Bible; the history of its text and formation; and its interpretation, which shows up both changes and interesting continuities over the centuries.

Barton is constantly mindful that the majority of the texts which he is discussing, namely those which Christians have come to call the Old Testament, are Jewish texts, and is keen to play up differences (and some similarities) in

the history and interpretation of the Bible from the contrasting perspectives of Jews and Christians.

Christians have traditionally interpreted the Bible as a story about fall and redemption, a tale which begins with Adam and ends with Jesus, whose redemptive role is taken to be prophesied in what they term the Old Testament. Jews, on the other hand, have seen the Bible not as a story of disaster and rescue, but of providential guidance, seen in Jewish history and the Torah. These divergent interpretations raise complex questions, which, since the Holocaust, have begun to be discussed with more sensitivity to ideas of difference. This issue is just one of a number Barton

For Christians it is a story about fall and redemption

highlights. Another is that there are differences between biblical text and what we find espoused in Judaism and Christianity. Barton argues that methods of interpretation, like allegory for instance, help soften these differences.

In addition, Barton highlights the development of a set of traditions, taken both to be guides to the interpretation of the Bible, and derived from the text itself (eg. the creed). These traditions came under scrutiny during the Reformation, with its strong emphasis on the sufficiency of 'scripture alone'. As Barton shows however, all religious groups that use the Bible – Jewish or Christian – are forced to make use of such 'traditions' in order to bring unity to such a heterogeneous set of texts, and the tension between these and the Bible remains a point of discussion.

Since the Enlightenment, but especially from the 19th century, the Bible has come to be viewed with historical-critical tools. The facts it purports to record have been questioned and the complexity of the development of its individual books, their authorship, emphases and text, laid bare. Although Barton only devotes a small proportion of his masterly book to the history of this development, this perspective undergirds much of the volume. This is not carried out in a destructive or negative way; indeed, Barton maintains an admirably sober tone, even when discussing theories of inspiration, which seem to sit uneasily with a historically based view of the biblical texts.

What emerges is a sense of the massively complex history and diversity of a document which, Barton holds, is central to both Jewish and Christian identity, but whose understanding cannot be captured in glib or dogmatic claims. "Freedom of interpretation, yet commitment to religious faith, need to go hand in hand. This seems possible if we accept the Bible as a crucial yet not infallible document of Christian faith," Barton writes on the final page of this tour de force, in a sentence that succeeds in capturing its broadly liberal perspective. ■

James Carleton Paget is reader in New Testament studies at Peterhouse, Cambridge

David Cameron speaks to the press following a meeting of EU leaders in Brussels in 2016

History in the making

ALWYN TURNER assesses a pertinent study of Brexit, but suspects the insights may have come too late

A Short History of Brexit: From Bretnry to Backstop

by Kevin O'Rourke

Pelican, 384 pages, £20

Few industries have embraced Brexit with more enthusiasm than publishing. The presses are busy producing new titles on the subject, of which this is the latest.

Kevin O'Rourke is an Irishman who defines himself as a European and who says of EU citizenship that “it is only when you are deprived of it that you realise just how precious it is”. Unsurprisingly, then, he takes a dim view of Britain’s decision to leave the Union, referring to the referendum vote and the election of Trump as “the disasters of 2016”. Further, O’Rourke is an economics professor at Oxford, “a middle-of-the-road Keynesian”, who views the austerity programme of David Cameron and George Osborne as “the

greatest catastrophe to hit British business since the war”. Austerity, therefore, looms larger in his understanding of the Brexit vote than does, say, a sense of British nationhood.

Nonetheless, this is not, for the most part, a polemic, and O’Rourke strives to remain even-handed. For the first third of the book he succeeds, giving a potted history of Britain’s relationship with Europe and the building of the European project. There are no great revelations here, but it’s a welcome summary with interesting detours, particularly into the adoption of VAT and its operation.

The central section, with chapters on the connections between Ireland, Britain and the EU, tells a story that’s far less familiar, certainly for many British readers. The fact that this is such a novel

Austerity looms large in this understanding of the Brexit vote



perspective on this side of the Irish Sea should be a cause of shame to the British media. The issues surrounding the Northern Irish border played little part in the referendum campaign, and their sudden eruption into the subsequent negotiations seemed to come as something of a shock to politicians as well as to the public.

Much of the final part of the book deals with those negotiations. It’s a tale that needs to be told, but with the outcome still to be decided, it’s not clear that this is the time or place for a month-by-month, blow-by-blow account of exchanges between Michel Barnier, David Davis and the rest of the cast.

This post-referendum material feels like journalism in its role as the first,

Grand designs

ALAN POWERS considers a biography charting the trailblazing work and elusive personal life of one of design history’s towering figures

Walter Gropius: Visionary Founder of the Bauhaus

by Fiona MacCarthy

Faber & Faber, 560 pages, £30

There are two contrasting ways of seeing Walter Gropius (1883–1969). In one he is a man of deep emotion who lived through stirring times; in the other, a cold,

calculating operator in his roles as architect, director of the Bauhaus art school and movement, and propagandist

for his own achievements. Both are true, although the cold side has probably been exaggerated over time.

Two other star architects who worked alongside Gropius, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, have both received in-depth biographical studies, from which their more romantic and human aspects have emerged. Gropius only had a hagiography from an American colleague, Reginald Isaacs – informative, but not a study of psychological depth.

Gropius is not an easy figure to redeem, even for as skilled a life-writer as Fiona MacCarthy. His love affairs get

comprehensive coverage, and we can wonder anew at the magnetism and appalling emotional manipulation exerted by his first wife, Alma Mahler. Gropius’s second wife, Ise Frank, emerges more clearly than before as the woman he came to rely on for stability as well as stimulus (not that he was 100 per cent faithful to her, nor she to him).

MacCarthy first discovered Gropius in part through the memories of those who hosted him in London in the mid-1930s, and this period of his life gets unaccustomed coverage. However, English conservatism (rather than an attractive job offer from Harvard and escape from the looming threat of Nazism) is unfairly blamed for his moving to the US in 1937.

Gropius the operator is played down in order to win the reader’s sympathy, but he still seems like a man avoiding our



rough draft of history. And it has the inevitable problem of journalism: that it can so easily be overtaken by events. Warnings of how Honda in Swindon and Nissan in Sunderland would struggle to deal with Brexit are surely accurate, but – with both plants now scheduled for closure – no longer entirely relevant.

This is a lucid exploration of the economic aspects of Brexit. But it's not clear who it's aimed at. Had it emerged prior to the referendum, it might have helped inform a debate that was so desperately ill-informed. Unfortunately, the publishing industry wasn't as keen on the subject back then. **H**

Alwyn W Turner's books include *A Classless Society: Britain in the 1990s* (Aurum, 2013)

gaze, with the result that the size of his reputation is hard to explain. He went in search of danger and difficulty, and the Bauhaus, although associated with rationality, was in most respects an insanely ambitious and unstable project. That is what makes it interesting, but its actual contribution to culture has probably been overrated. In later life, Gropius unquestionably did great service in gathering documents about it, but the posthumous Bauhaus industry has built a protective shield distorting the possibility of a balanced picture. While some of the accusations made against Gropius don't stand scrutiny, it is still hard to see through to the man who inspired such god-like veneration. **H**

Alan Powers is leader of historical studies at the London School of Architecture

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A product of environment

JERRY BROTTON applauds an ambitious vision of how landscape and climate have defined humanity's development

Origins: How the Earth Made Us

by Lewis Dartnell

Bodley Head, 352 pages, £20



Big history is back. To understand the profound changes that gave rise to the current moment of globalisation requires historical interpretation embracing long periods of time. The turn to big history draws on environmentalism, archaeology and even geology in understanding long-term change as we enter the new age of the Anthropocene, in which human activity is regarded as the dominant influence on climate and the environment. There can be no bigger history than Lewis Dartnell's exciting panorama of how the geological forces that created the Earth over billions of years have in turn determined the nature of humanity and its civilisations.

There is an exuberant, almost aggressive geological determinism to Dartnell's argument. "We are all apes," he begins, observing that the water in our bodies once flowed through the Nile, our sweat and tears came from the rocks at the Earth's crust. Our dispersal out of Africa around 60,000 years ago was due to climate fluctuations between wet and dry conditions which also defined our mental and physical adaptability to different geographical conditions.

From here Dartnell charts how most of humanity's great civilisations were "the children of plate tectonics", lying on dangerous plate boundaries whose fertile soils came from the sediment of mountainous and volcanic activity. The silk roads of central Asia that carried so much trade and information between east and west were born of specific

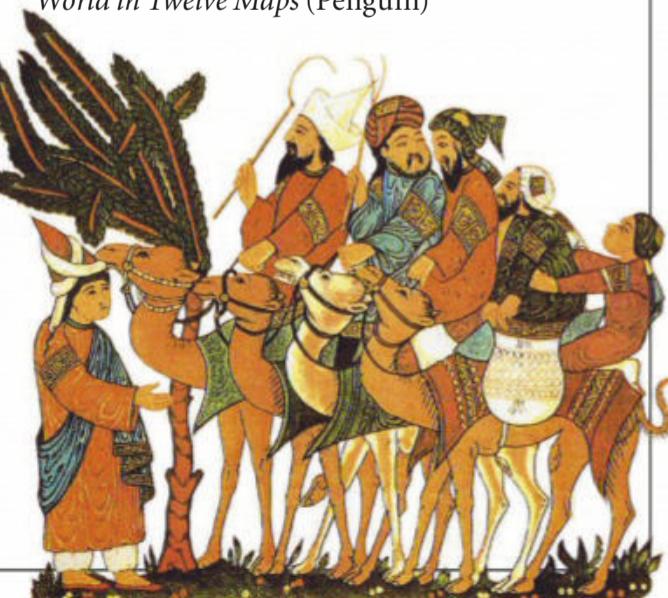
meteorological conditions that created nomadic communities in the savannahs and farmers in the vast agricultural regions.

The great age of seaborne discovery between 1450 and 1650 was driven as much by global wind patterns and the currents in the Atlantic and Indian oceans as by an innate curiosity of explorers to discover new lands. Plate tectonics were also the driver of the industrial revolution, with Britain benefitting from "a geological bonanza" of carboniferous coal that drove the new automated industries that in turn drove the modern globalised economy.

Origins is a bravura survey that captures our global zeitgeist and emphasises the limits of short-term historical and political thinking. However, its seductive descriptive power raises a series of more pressing questions as to where such geographical determinism leaves us today. Dartnell could have reflected at greater length on global warming, aside from arguing we should "decarbonise our economy", or on the pitfalls of our current Anthropocene epoch as wars and conflicts over scarce natural resources only intensify. Perhaps it is unfair to ask a scientist to engage in such questions, but if Dartnell wants to explain our origins as a species, maybe he could have used his geological models to look to our future and consider where we might be going? **H**

Jerry Brotton is the author of *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (Penguin)

Medieval Middle-Eastern merchants. A new book argues that trade routes were shaped by climate





Witches dance with demons in a woodcut. Fears about the dark power of witchcraft abound in a new novel by Niamh Boyce

FICTION

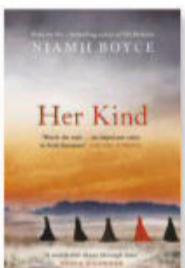
An unholy fear of women

NICK RENNISON is drawn in by an evocative depiction of a medieval Irish town, swirling with rumours of black magic

Her Kind

by Niamh Boyce

Penguin Ireland, 320 pages, £12.99



In 1324, Kilkenny is a divided town. Because of her great wealth and social standing, Dame Alice Kytler wields power in High Town. Across the river, in Irish Town,

stands the cathedral where the English bishop, Richard Ledrede, resentful of Kytler's influence, plots to bring her down. Outside the fortified town walls, in the hills and valleys of the surrounding countryside, live Gaelic-speaking people, still largely untouched by the town authorities which intermittently seek to control them.

From these wild lands come a mother and her mute teenage daughter, driven into Kilkenny by hunger and deprivation. They take refuge with Dame Alice who gives them the names Petronelle and Basilia, and employs them as servants. As they settle into the life of the rich household, it soon becomes clear

that Alice and Petronelle share a secret history. This has something to do with Basilia's father, who died years earlier. Was he killed in battle? Or is there another explanation for his death?

Petronelle is finally forced to confront the terrible truth about his fate. At the same time, Ledrede, a man sickly obsessed by his lurid fantasies of witchcraft and the work of the devil, is weaving a web in which to entangle Alice and all who serve her.

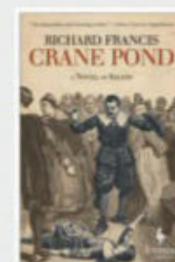
Niamh Boyce's debut novel, *The Herbalist*, was a compelling story of a mysterious stranger's impact on the women of a 1930s Irish town. In her second book, she has travelled much further back into the country's past. *Her Kind* is a moving, atmospheric re-imagining of the events surrounding the historically documented Kilkenny Witch Trial. Mostly narrated by Petronelle and Basilia, it gives powerful voices to the kind of women that history has all too often ignored. ■

Nick Rennison is the author of *Carver's Truth* (Corvus, 2016)

THREE MORE TALES OF WITCH TRIALS

Crane Pond

Richard Francis (2016)

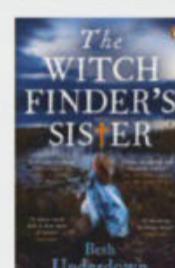


The Salem witch trials of 1692–93 are probably the most famous in history. The presiding judge in that case, who sentenced so many innocent women to death, was

Samuel Sewall. Later, Sewall came to realise how wrong he had been and was wracked with guilt. Richard Francis's unusual and absorbing novel looks at the events through the eyes of one of the persecutors, exploring the inner life of an idealistic man who nonetheless committed terrible crimes.

The Witchfinder's Sister

Beth Underdown (2017)



On the death of her husband, Alice Hopkins is obliged to leave London and return to her home town of Manningtree in Essex where her brother Matthew is

a man of growing consequence. England in the 1640s is ravaged by civil war, and rumours of witchcraft abound. In this prize-winning tale of power, fear and prejudice, Matthew has vowed to hunt down the practice wherever it may be found.

The Familiars

Stacey Halls (2019)



Fleetwood

Shuttleworth, the impressively named heroine of Stacey Halls's gripping first novel, is a teenage wife in early 17th-century Lancashire. Mistress of Gawthorpe Hall, she lives a comfortable life but is desperate to provide her husband with a child after several miscarriages. A young midwife, Alice Gray, offers her hope.

However, Alice is caught up in the persecution of the Pendle witches and only Fleetwood can save her from imprisonment and death.



Influential
thriller writer
Eric Ambler,
shown in 1953

Jonathan Wright previews the pick of upcoming programmes

TV & RADIO

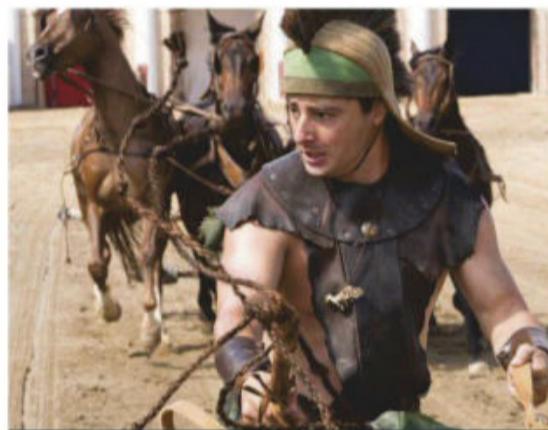
Spy stories

The Battle of San Pietro

Radio Radio 4

scheduled for Saturday 27 April

The work of British novelist Eric Ambler (1909–98) from the 1930s both captured the sense of dread that began to grip Europe in the run-up to the Second World War and ushered in a new, grittier kind of espionage tale. Radio 4 is celebrating his life and work in a short season starting with the biographical drama *The Battle of San Pietro*, focusing on his relationship with American film director John Huston, with whom he worked on Second World War propaganda films. Also scheduled are adaptations of *Journey into Fear* (28 April) and *Epitaph for a Spy* (12 May).



The story of the rise and fall of Roman chariot racer Scorpus is brought to life

Bread and circuses

Secrets of the Roman Chariot Race

TV Channel 4

scheduled for Sunday 21 April

Chariot racing was a spectacle that drew huge crowds and became central to Roman life. But what was it like to be in charge of the Roman equivalent of a Formula One racing car? Basing his design on a bronze statue from the British Museum, chariot-maker Robert Hurford sets out to build one.

Military historian and weapons expert Mike Loades gets to drive the horses. The documentary also delves into the life of Scorpus (c68–95 AD), a slave who won more than 2,000 races yet died in his mid-20s, probably in a crash.

Hidden depths

Producer Franny Moyle tells us about an ambitious film that looks beyond Oscar Wilde's bon mots

The Importance of Being Oscar

TV BBC Two

scheduled for late April

Think of Oscar Wilde and many of us think of a conjurer of epigrams, a shameless self-publicist with nothing to declare but his genius. Or perhaps Wilde the tragic martyr, imprisoned for his homosexuality, a disgraced and shunned figure.

But neither of these images, suggests Franny Moyle, executive producer of a new feature-length documentary about Wilde, comes close to capturing his essence. "This is the story of Oscar before his downfall," she says of a film that looks anew at Wilde. "It's about the brilliance of his work. It's a richer, more surprising, more complex version of a man who has tended towards caricature posthumously."

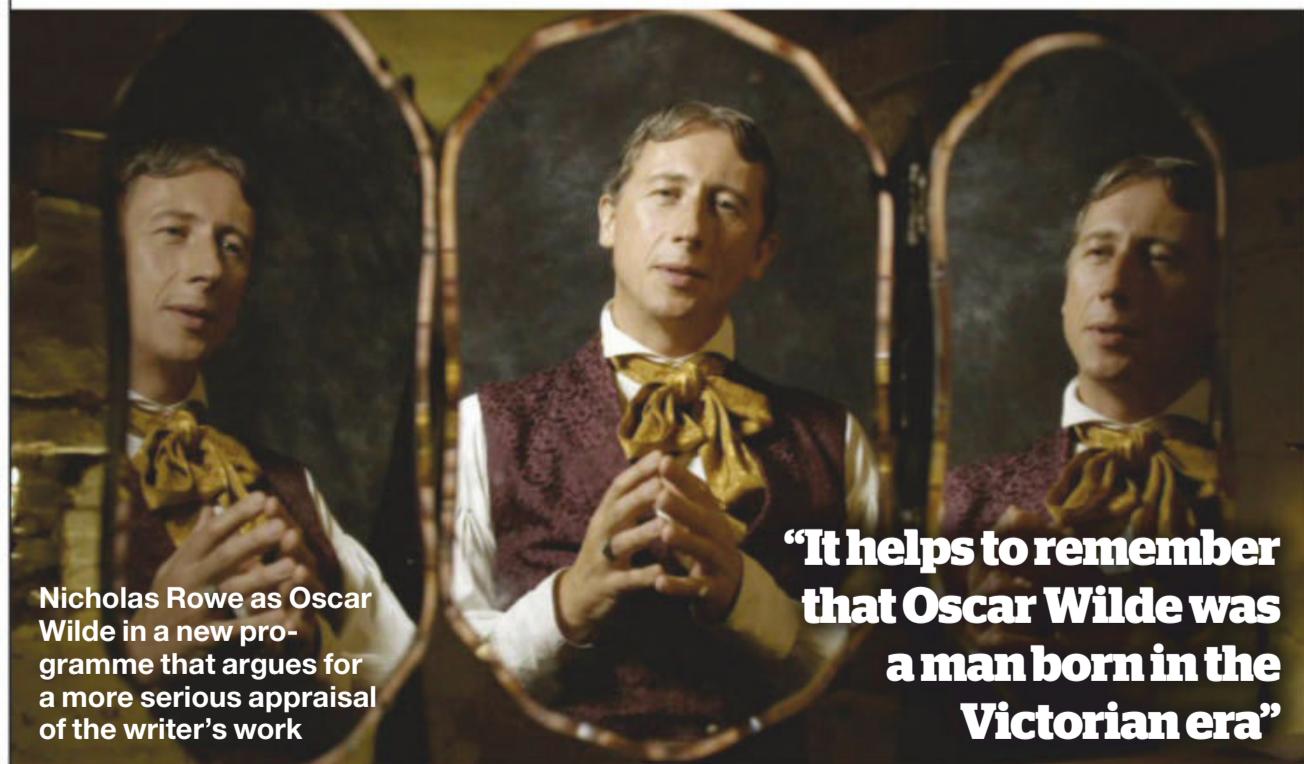
That's not to say Wilde the gay wit is in any way absent from the documentary, but it also explores his early life in Dublin, reminds us that Wilde was a husband and father, and treats his writing – Wilde was a journalist, poet, playwright, novelist and short story writer – seriously. Early in the film, for example, contributor Stephen Fry describes *The Importance of Being*

Earnest (1895), which could be seen as a flimsy society romcom, as "perfect".

"[The plays] are far from trivial," says Moyle. "They deal with women – completely pertinent now – a lot of them are about the abuse of women. They're also about the abuse of society, the ridiculousness of class and privilege, and they feel spine-tinglingly relevant. I was rather surprised by that."

If there's more grit to the work than we sometimes allow, that's perhaps because both our main caricatures of Wilde place him somehow outside his times as a kind of miraculous one-off. It helps, perhaps, to remember he was a man born in the Victorian era. "A lot of his work responded absolutely to his moment and to all sorts of issues that were live then: society; the Irish question; and the rise of feminism," says Moyle. "He was a man of his time."

Underscoring this idea, the documentary doesn't just feature celebrity fans, it also finds space for historians and biographers including Wilde's grandson, the biographer and editor Merlin Holland. Rounding out the picture are dramatisations of Wilde's work featuring the likes of Claire Skinner, Anna Chancellor and James Fleet. H



Nicholas Rowe as Oscar Wilde in a new programme that argues for a more serious appraisal of the writer's work

"It helps to remember that Oscar Wilde was a man born in the Victorian era"

Musical pioneers

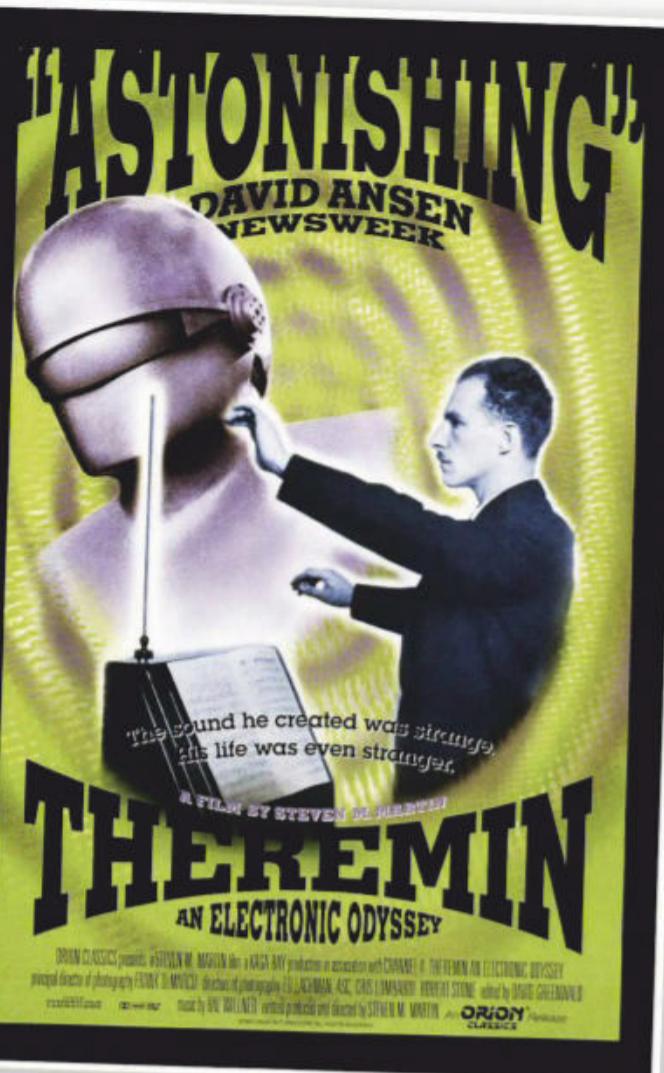
A History of Music and Technology

Radio BBC World Service

Saturday 27 April

We now take it for granted that we can listen to music recorded decades ago. Yet the idea of capturing the moment rests on technological innovation. Similarly, many of the instruments used in contemporary music, notably the synthesiser and electric guitar, have been developed comparatively recently. Presented by Nick Mason of Pink Floyd fame, *A History of Music and Technology* explores how these innovations have shaped popular music over the years.

The first of nine episodes begins not just with clever inventors working out how to capture sound, but the idea that audiences had to learn to listen to recorded music. Subsequent episodes deal with the work of early electronic music pioneers such as Léon Theremin (1896–1993), the inventor of the early



A 1993 poster shows Léon Theremin with the world's first electronic instrument

electronic instrument that bears his name and that gave an eerie quality to movie soundtracks *Spellbound* (1945) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951).

Other episodes explore the electric guitar, beats and breaks, and the story of the recording studio. Interviewees include musician Rick Wakeman, producer Trevor Horn, and Peter Vogel, inventor of the Fairlight CMI sampler, key to so many hits in the 1980s.

Across the great divide

Deutschland 83 & Deutschland 86

DVD (Acorn Media International; cert: 15)

When it was first shown in the UK in 2016 as part of Channel 4's 'Walter Presents' strand, German-American espionage thriller *Deutschland 83* attracted an audience of 2.5 million, still a record for a foreign language drama.

At its heart lies Martin Rauch (Jonas Nay), an East German border guard who goes undercover in West Germany and is ordered to steal Nato secrets. Gradually, he is seduced by what he finds and – with even

greater danger to his personal wellbeing – he falls in love.

The sequel, *Deutschland 86*, recently broadcast by More4, is every bit as powerful – and deadpan funny. It begins by following East German efforts to sell arms to South Africa's apartheid regime as a way to raise hard currency. It's a plot rooted in the experience of Soviet satellite states in eastern Europe as hated regimes faced a new world where financial and political support were being withdrawn.

A third series, set in 1989, the year the Berlin Wall came down, is in the pipeline, but for now, this four-disc set has pace, style and, in its exploration of the latter years of the Cold War, substance.



Rose (Florence Kasumba), left, and Lenora (Maria Schrader) in *Deutschland 86*

ALSO LOOK OUT FOR...



Jamestown is set for a return to our screens in late April

Even in an era when monarchs are no longer expected to lead the charge, there's nevertheless an expectation that those with blue blood will serve in the military.

Royals on the Frontline (Yesterday, Monday 6 May) charts what happens when a member of the royal family goes into a war zone, as Prince Philip did as a naval officer during the Second World War and, more recently, when Prince Harry went to Afghanistan.

On Sky One, **Jamestown** (Friday 26 April) is the final series of the drama centred on life in the first permanent English settlement in north America. There's more period drama, albeit with more blood and guts, in the fifth season of **Vikings** (History, Tuesday 16 April).

In Our Time (Radio 4) is a more sedate affair, although Melvyn Bragg does take a hard line with guests who don't get to the point. Upcoming episodes will feature Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Thursday 18 April), Emperor Nero (Thursday 25 April) and the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780 (Thursday 2 May). Also on Radio 4, new episodes of **Great Lives** (Tuesday 23 April) include poet Ian McMillan speaking up for fellow writer Malcolm Lowry of *Under the Volcano* fame.

Finally, Easter programming includes Oscar-winning actor Jeremy Irons reading **The Psalms** (Radio 4, Friday 19 April–Monday 22 April) from the King James version of the Bible.

FIND WEEKLY
TV & RADIO
UPDATES AT
historyextra.com/topic/tv-and-radio

BON VOYAGE

Rent a Novasol holiday home in Vendée – an enticing mix of historical sites, museums, striking countryside and some of the best beaches in France

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The region's flagship museum, the Historial de la Vendée, offers an impressively diverse range of exhibitions, from military history to nature, with a dedicated children's museum – perfect for a family trip.

The Logis de la Chabotterie, a grand house originally constructed in the 15th century and a crucial setting for the Vendée wars during the French Revolution, is just one historical highlight. You can immerse yourself in the revolutionary spirit at the Refuge de Grasla – a recreated village deep in the forest where civilians would seek shelter from the violence.

And for yet more family-friendly history, the Puy de Fou theme park – second only to Disneyland Paris for popularity – puts on exhilarating performances based on a range of stories, from the Vikings to Verdun. Elsewhere, the ruins of the Roman Catholic Maillezais Cathedral are a must-see for history buffs.

If you're looking to unwind, choose from Vendée's plentiful beaches, which stretch across more than 120 miles of coastline, many of them FEE Blue Flag-certified.



Search: **FJD029** -Countryside, 5 Bedrooms, 10 guests, Private Pool

COULONGES SUR L'AUTIZE

This charming, spacious house sleeps up to 10, with a sizeable pool and plenty of outdoor space to relax or play badminton or table tennis. The huge lounge and dining area make this the perfect place for a big family holiday, and if you can tear yourself away from the house, head to the nearby pretty town of Coulognes and the beach lake complex of Chassenon.

Search: **FVE056** -Seaside, 2 Bedrooms, 5 guests, Private Pool

LA JONCHÈRE

This property sits only 10 minutes from the coast and sleeps up to five people. You'll find an attractive, private garden and terrace, as well as a shared swimming pool. The house is located in the centre of the village, while larger Angles isn't far away. Proximity to miles of coastline and pine forests provides ample opportunity for walks and water sports activities.

NOVASOL has more than 200 properties in the Vendée and over 4,500 holiday homes and apartments across France. **TO FIND YOURS, VISIT NOVASOL.CO.UK**



The refurbished auditorium of Regent Street Cinema where, in 1896, film history was made

HISTORY EXPLORER

The birth of British cinema

Jon Bauckham and Frank Gray explore **Regent Street Cinema**, where motion pictures were first screened to a paying audience in Britain

It may be a Wednesday afternoon at London's Regent Street Cinema, but the auditorium is packed to the rafters. As the lights dim and the curtains open, the chatter of the patrons is replaced by the familiar whirr and click of a film projector. No sooner has the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lion made its presence known, than the audience settles down to enjoy a matinee screening of 1952 musical *Hans Christian Andersen*, starring Danny Kaye as the singing Danish storyteller.

Reopened to the public in 2015, following a multi-million pound restoration, the historic repertory cinema is owned by the University of Westminster and housed adjacent to its headquarters at 309 Regent Street. Indeed, exit through the wrong door and suddenly you are transported from the hushed green and gold hues of the cinema into a brightly lit university foyer, filled with students hurriedly making their way to their next lecture.

Unlike the modern multiplexes in nearby Leicester Square, the cinema is a peaceful, popcorn-free haven. Architecturally, there's a noticeable connection with the past, too. From a seat in front of the projection booth, at the top of a steep rake, visitors are close enough to the

ceiling to admire the neoclassical motifs present within the art deco plasterwork, added when the venue was converted from a theatre into a commercial cinema in 1927.

The most famous event in the venue's history came more than 30 years earlier, however, before the modern concept of cinema was even conceived. It was inside this same auditorium that, on 21 February 1896, brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière organised a demonstration of their newly patented Cinématographe to 54 fee-paying members of the public. Once the guests were seated, the small box-like contraption projected a series of black and white 'living images' on to a screen at the front of the room. Despite lasting a matter of minutes, it was the first-ever public film screening to a British audience.

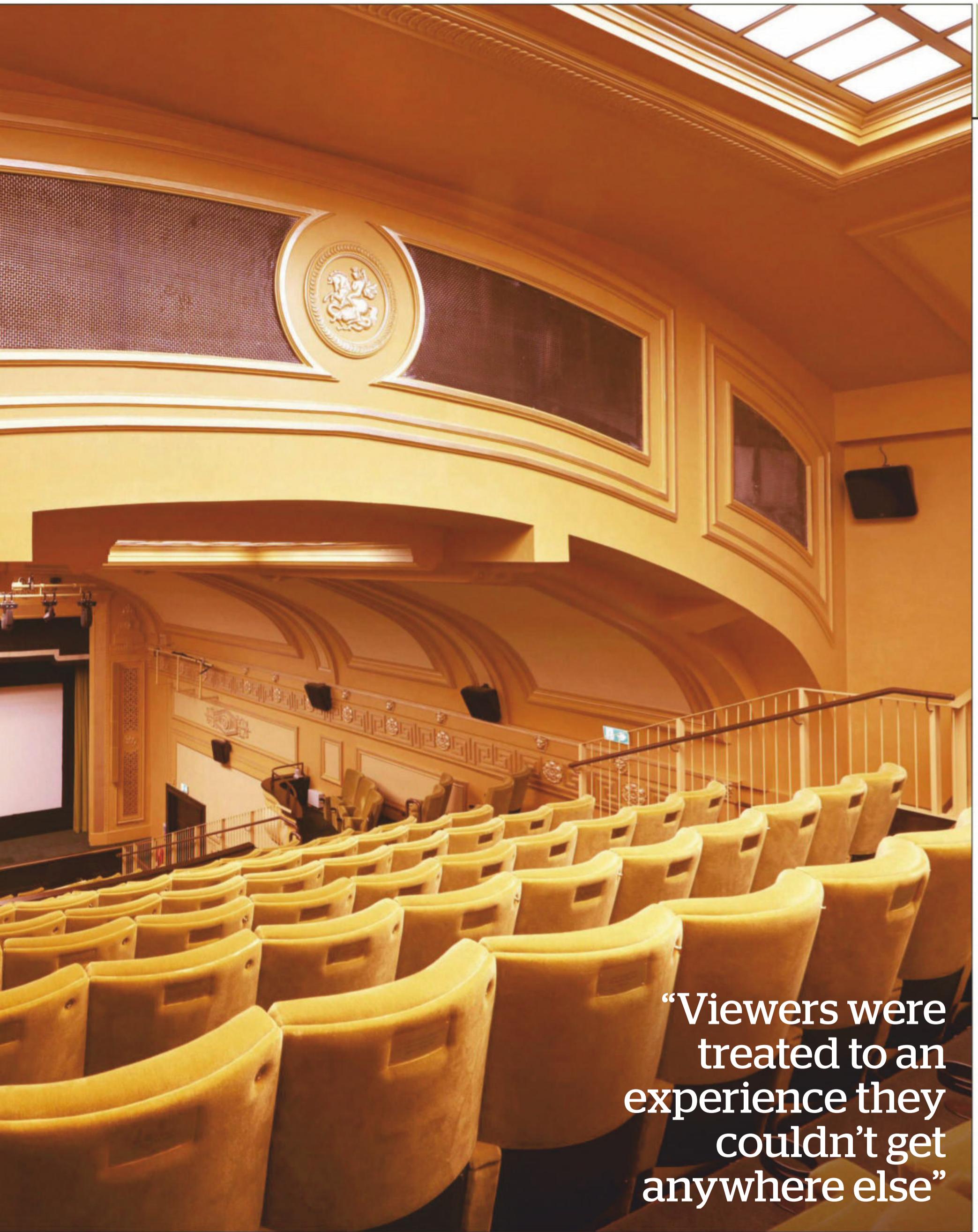
Ghouls and demons

It is no accident that the venue – then known as the Regent Street Polytechnic – was chosen as the first location on British soil to showcase the Lumière's creation, which had been first demonstrated in Paris the previous December. Opened in 1838, the educational establishment had become famous for its eclectic mix of public lectures and scientific demonstrations, but particularly its magic lantern shows – an early form of optical entertainment

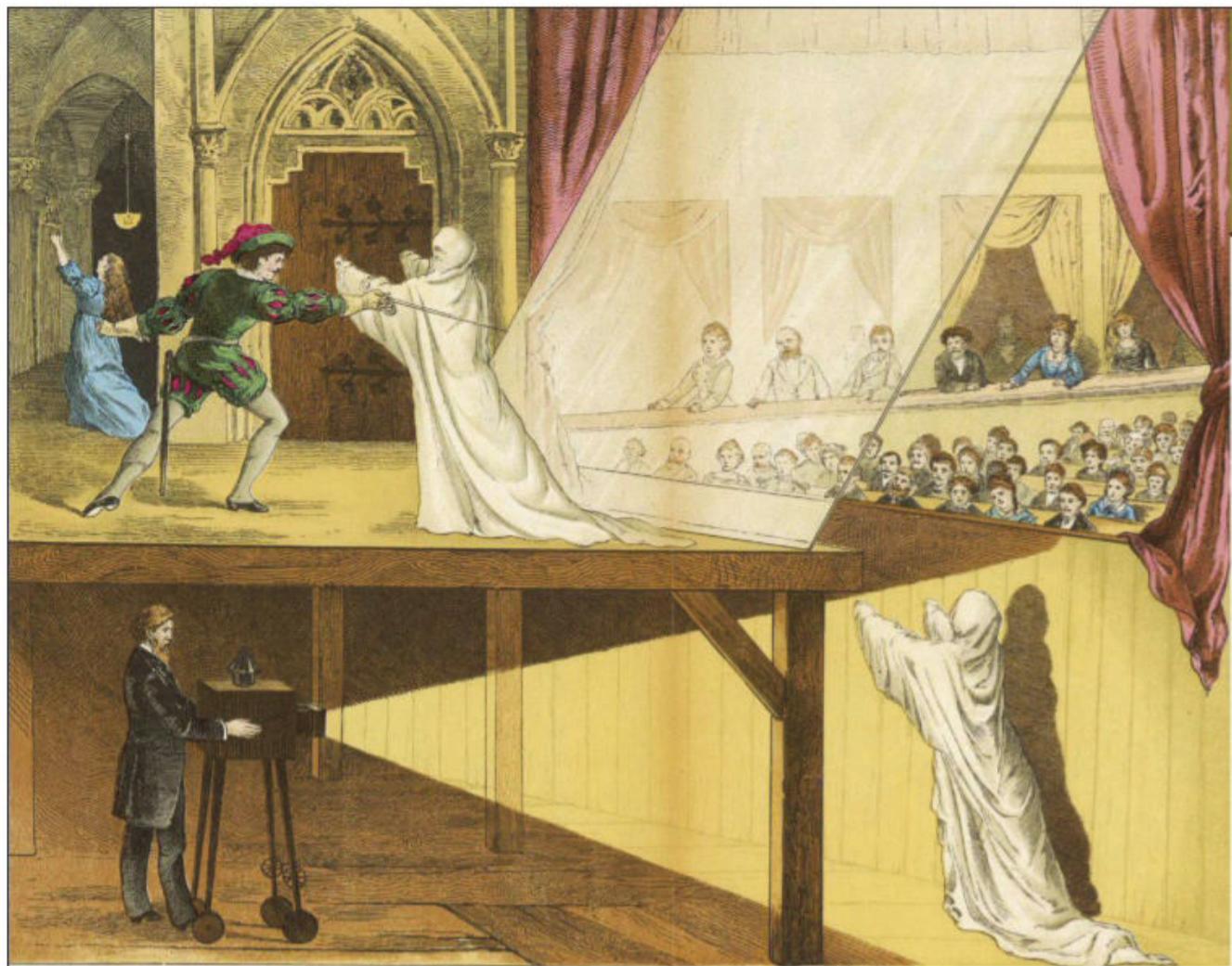
Brothers Auguste (far left) and Louis Lumière were pioneers of early cinema

BRIDGEMAN/UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER





“Viewers were treated to an experience they couldn’t get anywhere else”



'Pepper's Ghost' performs before an enraptured audience in this image from 1882. Clever use of lamps and glass panels meant ghostly images could be conjured on to the stage

that involved the projection of images onto a screen using illuminated glass slides.

"The German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher wrote extensively about the art of optical projection in the mid-17th century," explains Dr Frank Gray, an expert in early British cinema at the University of Brighton. "Through a series of engravings and descriptions, he demonstrated how it was possible to project an image through a set of lenses onto a wall."

It wasn't until the late 18th century that the technology started to become widely employed for the purposes of entertainment with the use of candle-lit projectors and hand-painted slides. Often these performances fell into the category of 'phantasmagoria' – shows with distinctly supernatural themes, in which ghouls and demons were projected into the room. By the end of the 19th century, it is estimated that there were approximately 3,500 travelling lanternists performing shows up and down Britain. You could find them virtually everywhere, including pier theatres, music halls and churches.

The magic lantern shows at the polytechnic took place inside the same purpose-built theatre in which the Regent Street Cinema is now housed. Remodelled on several occasions and later known as the Marlborough Hall, the theatre boasted the latest developments in lantern technology, including a state-of-the-art projection booth tucked underneath the upper tier.

As a result, the venue was able to execute special effects well beyond the capabilities of the typical travelling lanternist, including illusions such as 'Pepper's Ghost', named after scientist John Henry Pepper. First demonstrated during a performance of Charles Dickens's *The Haunted Man* on Christmas Eve 1862, the trick is still widely used today, using lamps and glass panels to conjure spectral figures on to the stage.

Baffling realism

It wasn't until the 1890s that the idea of showcasing 'motion pictures' became truly widespread. The concept arguably found mass appeal following the invention of Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope, a free-standing wooden cabinet that allowed individual spectators to view films via a peephole. But the Lumière brothers – then working for their father's photography business in Lyon – wanted to utilise the technology in a radically different way.

"Unlike their peers, the Lumières saw the future not in how a film could be viewed by one person at a time, but how an *entire audience* could watch it – just like a lantern slide," says Gray. "The duo patented their Cinématographe on 13 February 1895, just three months after witnessing a demonstration of Edison's Kinetoscope. A private screening of their first film aired in Paris just over a month later, on 22 March."

By the time the brothers presented their device to the first paying audience in the



Crowds gather outside London's Empire Theatre in 1926, before it was rebuilt as a cinema

French capital on 28 December 1895, they had used the Cinématographe to both capture and print a selection of films, showcasing scenes of everyday life. It was these 50-second clips – bearing innocuous titles such as 'Baby's Breakfast' and 'Arrival of a Train at a Country Station' – that were shown at the Regent Street Polytechnic the following February. The event was a resounding success.

"Pictures are thrown on the screen through the medium of the Cinématographe with a realism that baffles description," wrote journalist Anna de Brémont of the Regent Street show. "People move about, enter and disappear, gesticulate, laugh, smoke, eat, drink and perform the most ordinary actions with a fidelity to life that leads one to doubt the evidence of one's senses."

Soon, Britons were introduced to the spectacle courtesy of a nationwide tour, with the brothers also securing residencies at both the polytechnic and nearby Empire Theatre of Varieties. But during these formative

SCREENINGS WERE SEEN AS SCIENTIFIC DEMONSTRATIONS AS MUCH AS THEY WERE REGARDED AS A FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT

VISIT**Regent Street Cinema**

years, the short performances were still viewed in much the same vein as the traditional magic lantern show, employing a ‘graphic describer’ (in this case, French entertainer Félicien Trewey) to introduce the films. In some respects this was a necessary diversion, filling in the awkward gaps as each new reel – approximately 17 metres in length – was loaded into the device.

“In 1896, although many people were seeing motion pictures for the first time, it was still in the context of a music hall show,” explains Gray. “A typical performance would last roughly three hours, with 10–15 different items, including music, comedy, dancing and animal acts. The Cinématographe Lumière, or perhaps Robert Paul’s rival Theatrograph device, would be one of many acts on the billing.

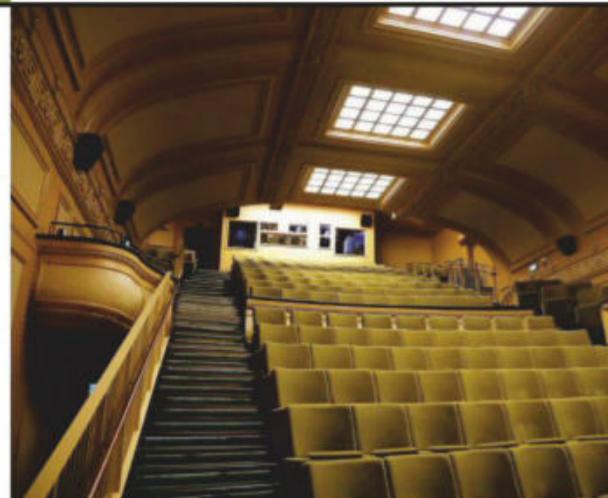
“The screenings were seen as scientific demonstrations as much as they were regarded as a form of entertainment,” Gray adds. “When we visit the cinema today, we’re not really connected in any way to the projector or the operator. But at Regent Street, the audience would have had a natural fascination with the presence of this funny little hand-cranked box situated in the middle of the room.”

Gun blasts and shouting

The creation of the modern-day cinema experience, Gray argues, also took place within the walls of the polytechnic, when it became home to Alfred John West’s two-hour spectacular, *Our Navy*, in 1899. Combining film, slides and music, these patriotic performances – held together by a single narrative – are said to have been intended to boost military recruitment during the Second Boer War (against the Afrikaners in South Africa from 1899–1902), but ended up remaining at Marlborough Hall for 14 years.

“Alfred John West’s programmes were remarkable,” says Gray. “When a gun was fired you would hear the blast, and when an officer gave a command, it would be shouted from behind the screen by an actor, in synchronisation with the action on screen.

“Crucially, viewers were presented with an experience that they couldn’t get anywhere else. The shows were a great hit and demonstrated, day by day, a new way of creating a wholly new moving image experience. Cinema no longer had to be a fairground



307 Regent Street, London, W1B 2HW

● regentstreetcinema.com

attraction or a music hall act.”

Over the next 10 years, dozens of picture houses opened across Britain’s provincial cities and towns. But it wasn’t until 1927 that Regent Street’s Marlborough Hall was converted into a cinema in its own right, let out for commercial use by a series of different operators. The interior underwent yet another makeover, adding upholstered seating, elaborate plasterwork, and a newly decorated arch above the stage and screen.

Today, the modern Regent Street Cinema pays homage to its 1920s guise more than any other earlier incarnation. Yet there are still a few remnants that the likes of the Lumière brothers would have recognised. Cast your eyes upwards and you can admire the original glass skylight running the full length of the ceiling towards the screen. Peek behind the curtains and you can see a surviving section of the theatre’s Victorian gallery, removed from the main auditorium in 1927, but bizarrely left intact in the void beyond the stage.

Despite the cinema’s many transformations, it’s hard not to feel a sense of continuity with the past. Step from the box office into the hustle and bustle of Regent Street and you’ll see this is still an area of the capital showcasing the latest developments in ‘optical entertainment’ – from flagship technology stores to BBC broadcasting studios. You can’t help but wonder what the spellbound audiences of the Regent Street Polytechnic of 1896 would make of it all. ■



Dr Frank Gray is director of Screen Archive South East at the University of Brighton and co-director of Cinecity, the Brighton film festival.

Words: Jon Bauckham, freelance writer

CINEMA HISTORY THREE MORE PLACES TO EXPLORE

1 The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum

EXETER

Where rare Lumière artefacts are held

Named after the late filmmaker and collector Bill Douglas (1934–91), this museum and research centre at the University of Exeter houses more than 75,000 items relating to the history of cinema and optical entertainment. There are 1,000 items on public display in the galleries, ranging from magic lantern slides to early film posters. The collection even includes an original 1896 Cinématographe Lumière and letters signed by the brothers themselves.

● bdcmuseum.org.uk

2 Cineworld

LEICESTER SQUARE, LONDON

Where the Cinématographe was presented as a music hall act

Located on the north side of Leicester Square, the Empire Cinema (below right) was originally a theatre and ballet venue, before reopening as a music hall known as the Empire Theatre of Varieties, in 1884. It was here, on 7 March 1896, that the Lumière brothers began showcasing their Cinématographe as a music hall act, less than a month after their first demonstration at the Regent Street Polytechnic. Rebuilt as a cinema in 1927, it is now a multiplex with nine screens.

● cineworld.co.uk



3 National Science & Media Museum

BRADFORD

Where you can view world-famous film collections

Located in the centre of Bradford, West Yorkshire (the first Unesco ‘City of Film’), this popular free museum features an array of interactive exhibits spread across eight floors. Although broadly focusing on the “science and culture of light and sound technologies”, it is home to world-famous film, photography and television collections, with more than 3 million items in total. The museum also boasts three cinema screens, including an IMAX theatre.

● scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk



HISTORY

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FIVE THINGS TO DO IN MAY

Royal celebrations

EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

Queen Victoria & Prince Albert's Bicentenary

V&A, London

Until 1 September 2019

020 7942 2000

vam.ac.uk/va-200



Marking 200 years since the births of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, the V&A Museum has launched a season of events and exhibitions to commemorate the lives of one of history's most famous royal couples. The highlight of the celebrations is the addition to the V&A's jewellery collection of the sapphire and diamond coronet designed for Queen Victoria by Prince Albert in 1840. The piece will be on permanent public display from 11 April in the museum's newly refurbished jewellery rooms.

Several other displays will also be on show throughout the season, including 'Prince Albert: Science & the Arts on the Page', which examines the prince consort's contributions to the V&A's library collections. Items on show include Prince Albert's signed season ticket to the Great Exhibition of 1851, as well as a published volume of songs written and set to music by Albert and his brother Ernest.

Elsewhere, the creation of the V&A Museum itself will be explored in 'Victoria and Albert's Museum', which features objects bought for and given to the museum up until Prince Albert's death in 1861. These include 'the royal collection' of items given by the couple in the 1850s, brought together for the first time in this display.

Visit the website for information on other talks and events.



TOP: Queen Victoria's sapphire and diamond coronet, made 1840–42

BOTTOM: *The Royal Children in the Nursery* lithograph, 1847

EXHIBITION / FREE ENTRY

Smoke and Mirrors: The Psychology of Magic

Wellcome Collection, London
Until 15 September

020 7611 2222

wellcomecollection.org

This year the Wellcome Collection examines the relationship between magic and psychology – from 19th-century séances to the sensationalist stunts of contemporary illusionists. A ghost detection kit and spirit photographs are among the fascinating objects on show.



EXHIBITION / FREE ENTRY

Making a Nation: Money, Image and Power in Tudor and Stuart England

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Until 30 June

01223 332900

fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

A look at the major dynastic, political and cultural changes that took place in England under the Tudors and Stuarts, examined through a selection of coins and medals.

Magician William Marriot with simulated spirit hands, c1910

EVENTS

Museums at Night

UK-wide

15–18 May

museumsatnight.org.uk

The twice yearly festival of late night events in museums and galleries across the UK returns this month. A host of events will be taking place over the four-day festival, including an audience with Henry VIII at the Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent, medieval mayhem at Norfolk's Elizabethan House Museum, and an evening visit to the Peak District Mining Museum in Derbyshire. Head to the website for a full list of events and activities taking place in your area.

EXHIBITION

Writing: Making Your Mark

British Library, London

26 April–27 August

01937 546546

bl.uk/events

More than 100 objects spanning 5,000 years and seven continents will go on show at the British Library this month, shedding light on the evolution of writing. Exhibits range from ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs carved in stone to early printed texts such as William Caxton's edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. Other objects on display include James Joyce's annotated copy of *Ulysses* and Burmese tattooing instruments.

The photogenic Trevi Fountain is a highlight of most visits to Rome

MY FAVOURITE PLACE

Rome, Italy



by Sarah Peverley

The latest in our historical holiday series sees Sarah Peverley soak up the sights and sounds of Italy's ancient capital

There are many ways to describe Italy's 'eternal' capital, but 20th-century writer Anatole Broyard captured it most eloquently when he declared that Rome is "a poem pressed into service as a city". Put simply, Rome assaults the senses and expands the mind. Every nook of the ancient metropolis oozes history and culture; every cobbled street reveals something new.

Getting the most out of the city requires a delicate balancing act. Cram too much into a short stay and Rome will leave you

feeling exhausted and short-changed. The trick is to plan ahead and make time for the most iconic sites alongside more restful hours spent soaking up the atmosphere in a scenic spot.

Most visitors flock to the historic heart of the city (Centro Storico), which can be chaotic and frustrating to navigate with its persistent snarl of Vespa engines, cocktail of car fumes and bustling crowds. Yet it is also one of the most rewarding areas, packed with treasures.

Easy to explore on foot, a stroll through the jumble of streets between the colourful

market at Campo de' Fiori and Villa Borghese effortlessly immerses the visitor in two millennia of art and architectural history. Highlights include the elegant Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, the photogenic Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps.

Once the site of Emperor Domitian's first-century stadium, Piazza Navona now effervesces with fountains and street performers, but Bernini's glorious Fountain of the Four Rivers takes centre stage, capturing the precision and lifelike movement of Baroque art.

Built by Emperor Hadrian in the early second century, the Pantheon is the best-preserved building of ancient Rome. This marvel of engineering rests on the foundations of an earlier temple completed in 27 BC and features the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome. Entering the Pantheon is a magical experience. Sunlight pours through a large hole, or oculus, at the centre of the dome, illuminating sculptures and frescoes that were added after the seventh century, when the temple became a Catholic church. Even on rainy days, the mesmerising effect of the oculus is not diminished, as visitors can watch the water drain away through small holes strategically



placed in the Pantheon's floor. The tomb of the celebrated Renaissance artist Raphael is also housed here.

North of the recently restored Trevi Fountain, the Spanish Steps throng with the crowds that congregate outside the house where the celebrated Romantic poet John Keats (1795–1821) spent his final months. But at the top of the steps, the Villa Borghese, one of Rome's tranquil public parks, has a slower pace. Here travellers can sit with a gelato (Italy's famous ice cream) and enjoy the dolce vita. The spacious gardens are home to a pretty boating lake, zoo, and the Galleria Borghese, which contains the remarkable art collection of Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1577–1633). Caravag-



The oculus (opening) in the dome of the Pantheon, Rome's "best-preserved ancient building"

ADVICE FOR TRAVELLERS

WHAT TO PACK

Comfortable shoes are essential for navigating the maze of cobbled streets. Pack a cover-up for bare shoulders if entering the city's stunning churches. To conjure the grandeur of ancient Rome, take a copy of Robert Graves's *I, Claudius* (1934), a historical novel told from the perspective of the first-century Roman emperor Claudius.

GETTING THERE

The city is served by two airports, Ciampino and Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino. There are direct flights to Rome from many UK airports and flight times are approximately 2 hours 40 minutes from London.

BEST TIME TO GO

April, May and September are great months to visit the city. Avoid August when the oppressive heat and crowds can be overwhelming.

WHAT TO BRING BACK

Replicas of ancient artefacts and jewellery – or, for a more contemporary memento, designer bags, cheese and wine.



gio, Titian, Raphael, Rubens and Bernini are all represented, while older works and artefacts, including pieces by the enigmatic Etruscan civilisation, which flourished in Italy between the eighth and third century BC, can be seen just beyond the gardens at Villa Giulia.

One of Rome's greatest lures is the constellation of Roman ruins adjacent to the Colosseum. Once the epicentre of the Roman empire, the dusty remains of the Forum, the Colosseum, and the imperial palace on Palatine Hill evoke the city's ancient grandeur and conjure a sense of its commercial, cultural and political importance. It isn't difficult to picture politicians wrangling in the Forum or imagine the noise generated by

the 50,000 or more spectators at the Colosseum's inaugural gladiatorial games in AD 80. Nor is it hard to while away the hours contemplating the beauty and colour of Palatine Hill, where, according to legend, Rome's mythological founders Romulus and Remus were raised by a she-wolf.

Heading west across the river Tiber, the leafy streets of Trastevere offer a respite from the bustle of these popular sites. Life here is unhurried and time can be spent exploring the cool interior of the Basilica of Santa Maria, one of Rome's oldest churches, or people-watching from cafes and restaurants.

Following the river as it winds back up to Castel Sant'Angelo reveals another area of contrast.

Built as a mausoleum for Emperor Hadrian, and later used as a fortress, a prison and hiding place for the pope, the castle is never overwhelmed by the hordes eager to explore St Peter's basilica and the museums at nearby Vatican City. Those who brave the many steps to the roof are rewarded with stunning vistas of the city and breathtaking sunsets. Watched over by a bronze Archangel Michael, this is the perfect spot for pondering the beauty and poetry that is Rome. **H**

Professor Sarah Peverley is a medievalist who was a 2013 BBC Radio 3 New Generation Thinker

Next month: Ellie Cawthorne visits D Day sites in Normandy

Been there...

Have you visited **Rome**? Do you have a top tip for readers? Contact us via Twitter or Facebook

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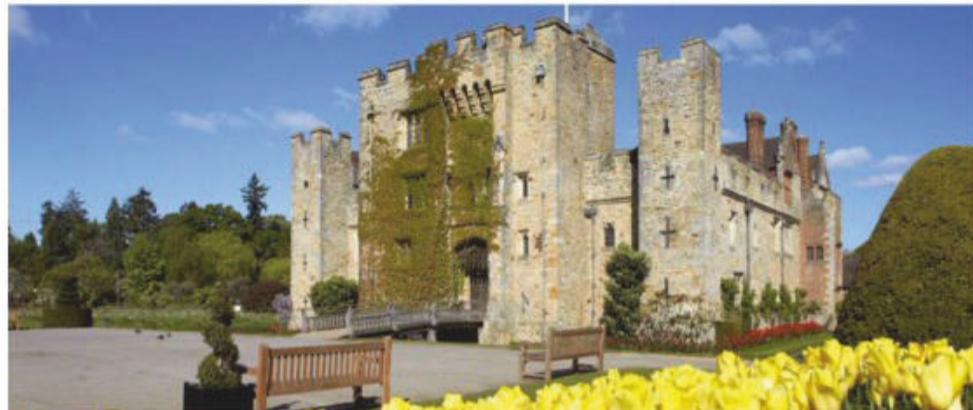
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“Put simply, Rome assaults the senses and expands the mind

Castles TO VISIT

With so much history to choose from, it's a great time to get out there and visit the country's castles. Discover historic ruins, enjoy a special event or spend the day conquering some of these fortresses.



Hever Castle & Gardens

Experience over 700 years of history at the childhood home of Anne Boleyn. The splendid rooms contain an important collection of Tudor paintings and two prayer books inscribed by Anne Boleyn. Today, much of what you see is the result of the remarkable efforts of William Waldorf Astor, who restored and extended the Castle in the early 20th century.

hevercastle.co.uk // info@hevercastle.co.uk



Thornbury Castle Hotel & Restaurant

Thornbury Castle Hotel, where Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn spent their honeymoon, has an impressive history. Atmospheric and regal bedchambers, stone walls, suits of armour, open fireplaces and Tudor Walled Gardens enhance the experience. The award-winning restaurant and private dining rooms offer atmospheric dining in a dramatic setting.

thornburycastle.co.uk // 01454 281182



Blair Castle

Blair Castle in Highland Perthshire has been the home of the Atholl family for over seven centuries. The family history is brought to life against a backdrop of fine 18th century interiors and Scottish baronial architecture, in 30 rooms on a self-guided tour. Group discounts available.

blair-castle.co.uk // bookings@blair-castle.co.uk



Belvoir Castle

One of the finest surviving examples of Regency architecture in the world, Belvoir Castle stands proud above Leicestershire's stunning Vale of Belvoir. A 19th Century castle, it's full of interesting artefacts and treasures collected by the Dukes of Rutland over the centuries. It's far from ordinary.

belvoircastle.com // 01476 871001



Pontefract Castle

Situated in the heart of West Yorkshire, Pontefract Castle is an ideal place for a family day out, combining wide open spaces to run and play with fascinating ruins to explore. The castle also boasts eerie dungeon tours, regular workshops and crafts in the Activity Zone, and a packed programme of special events throughout the year.

pontefractcastle.co.uk // 01977 723440



Chirk Castle

Construction of Chirk Castle began in the late 13th century, during the reign of Edward I, as part of his ring of fortifications in North Wales. The home of the Myddelton family since 1595, visitors can explore dank dungeons, lavish interiors, award-winning gardens and over 480 acres of landscaped parkland. Visit the Chirk Castle Facebook page to stay up to date with what's on throughout the year.

nationaltrust.org.uk/chirk-castle // 01691 777 701

UNDISCOVERED MUSEUMS

Explore the fascinating collections and displays available throughout the UK in this selection of museums that you may not have yet discovered



National Cycle Museum

Located in the famous Automobile Palace, Llandrindod Wells since 1997, the displays take the visitor on a journey through the life cycle of the bicycle over the last 200 years. The charity also has free activities to encourage children to enjoy learning about what is usually their favourite toy.

01597 825531 | curator@cyclemuseum.org.uk



The New Hall Art Collection

Founded in 1986, the New Hall Art Collection at Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge, is one of the largest and most significant collections of contemporary art by women in the world, with over five hundred works by artists of international quality and renown – including Dame Paula Rego and Lubaina Himid.

01223 762100 | art.newhall.cam.ac.uk



Chiltern Open Air Museum

Step back in time at Chiltern Air Museum. A historical adventure for the whole family including a replica Iron Age roundhouse, Victorian toll house, medieval barns, 1940s prefab, WW1 and WW2 Nissen huts, blacksmith's forge all in over 30 reconstructed historical buildings tracing the history of the Chilterns over 2000 years.

01494 871 117 | coam.org.uk



Quaker Tapestry Museum, Kendal

From railways to revolutions, never before has history been told so beautifully. Fascinating embroidered panels reveal an amazing chronicle of 350 years, from the abolition of slavery to developments in science and medicine. With interactive displays, films, workshops and children's activities there's something for all ages.

01539 722975 | quaker-tapestry.co.uk



The Novium Museum

Chichester's award-winning museum is built over an exposed Roman Bathhouse and has three floors of fascinating exhibitions, telling the story of Chichester District and its rich heritage. Every May half-term the museum hosts Chichester Roman Week featuring talks, trails, guided tours, family activities, re-enactments and more.

01243 775888 | thenovium.org



Woburn Abbey and Gardens

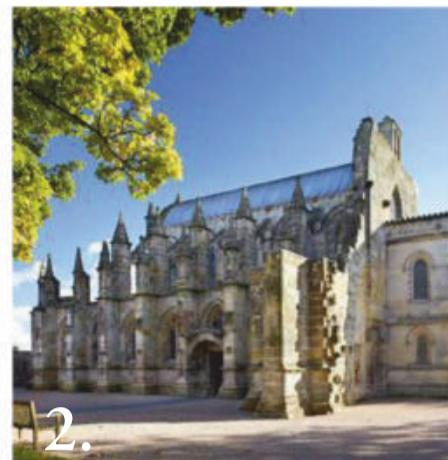
Step inside the home of the Duke and Duchess of Bedford and explore nearly 500 years of family stories and British history. Discover a unique art collection including an unrivalled group of 16th and 17th century portraits, the largest private collection of paintings by Canaletto on display and fine English and French furniture.

01525 290333 | woburnabbey.co.uk

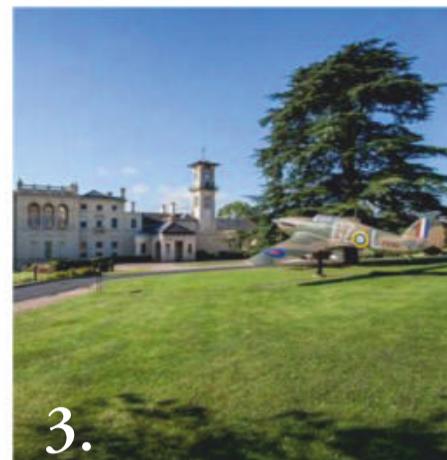
Spring Heritage Collection



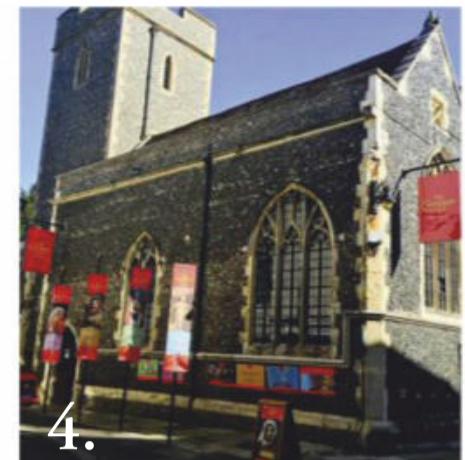
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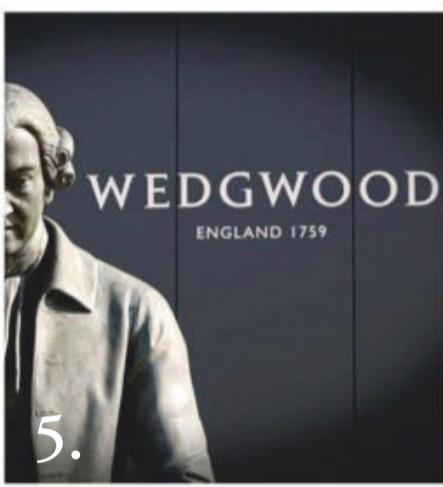
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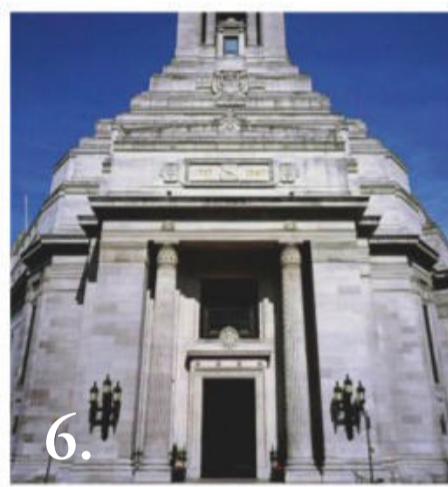
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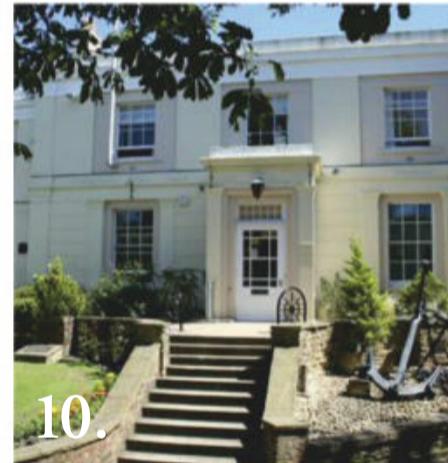
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9.



10.



11.



12.

1. BAMBURGH CASTLE

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bamburghcastle.com | 01668 214515

5. WEDGWOOD MUSEUM

Trace over 250 years of history and discover Josiah Wedgwood's lasting influence on industry and society. This museum houses the UNESCO protected V&A collection of huge historic and cultural significance.

worldofwedgwood.com

9. NEWARK TOWN HALL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Fascinating architectural gem designed in 1774 by John Carr. A working Town Hall that also contains a museum within its beautiful Georgian rooms

newarktownhallmuseum.co.uk

2. ROSSLYN CHAPEL

Founded in 1446, the beauty of its setting and its ornate stonework have inspired and attracted visitors for generations. Just seven miles south of Edinburgh, with good transport links, Rosslyn Chapel is open all year.

rosslynchapel.com | 0131 440 2159

6. LIBRARY AND MUSEUM OF FREEMASONRY

Discover three centuries of English freemasonry in a unique museum situated in one of London's most spectacular Art Deco buildings.

www.freemasonry.london.museum

10. LITTLEHAMPTON MUSEUM

Visit Littlehampton Museum to explore our interactive galleries and exhibitions, showcasing the rich history of our stretch of sunny Sussex coastline. Free admission and fully accessible all year round.

littlehamptonmuseum.co.uk | 01903 738100

3. BENTLEY PRIORY MUSEUM

Explore Bentley Priory Museum, from where the Battle of Britain was won, in north-west London. You can find out more about upcoming events, exhibitions and talks on our website.

bentleypriormuseum.org.uk | 020 8950 5526

7. FROGMORE MILL, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

Learn about the history of paper, make your own sheet, see a working 1902 paper machine and much more at the world's oldest mechanised paper mill.

thepapertrail.org.uk | 01442 234600

11. NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

Explore the real stories of ordinary people with extraordinary responsibilities. Discover the history of the British Army from the 1600s to the modern day through the Museum's world-class collection.

nam.ac.uk | 020 7730 0717

4. CANTERBURY TALES

Explore the sights, sounds and smells of medieval England in this unique experience. Join our costumed guides and revel in the recreated scenes as Chaucer's tales are brought vividly to life.

info@canterburytales.org.uk | 01227 696002

8. MUSEUM OF WITCHCRAFT & MAGIC

Contains the world's oldest and largest collection relating to witchcraft, magic and the occult in the world. Located in the historic harbour of Boscastle on the North Cornwall coast since 1960.

museumofwitchcraftandmagic.co.uk

12. WATTS GALLERY

Moonscapes - in the 50th-anniversary year of the first moon landing, explore this exhibition tracing nineteenth-century visions of the moon, including works by William Holman Hunt, John Atkinson Grimshaw and Evelyn De Morgan.

info@wattsgallery.org.uk | wattsgallery.org.uk

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MISCELLANY

Q&A

QUIZ

BY JULIAN HUMPHRYS

Try your hand at this month's history quiz

ONLINE QUIZZES
historyextra.com/quiz

1. What links *Blackadder* (below) and the Tudor revolution in government?



2. In 1895, what did Lilian Lindsay become the first woman in Britain to do?

3. Who commanded the minesweeper HMS *Bronington* for 10 months in 1976?

4. What links William de Tracy, Reginald Fitzurse, Hugh de Morville and Richard le Breton?

5. What was the 'Trail of Tears'?

6. What is the secret of this house at Kelvedon Hatch in Essex (pictured below)?



QUIZ ANSWERS

1. The Eltons. Ben Elton wrote for *Blackadder*; his uncle Geoffrey was a leading historian whose highly influential book *The Tudor Revolution in Government* was published in 1953.
2. Qualify as a dentist.
3. Prince Charles.
4. They were the knights who murdered Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170.
5. The forcible relocation of thousands of Native Americans to areas west of the Mississippi following the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830.
6. It houses the entrance to a Cold War nuclear bunker.

GOT A QUESTION?

Write to *BBC History Magazine*, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN. Email: historymagazine@historyextra.com or submit via our website: historyextra.com

Q Who first came up with the song 'Happy Birthday' – and when?

Noah Omoleye, Bristol

A The popular song we all sing when blowing out the candles first appears in an American songbook in 1912, though was probably in use earlier.

It is usually said to have come from a tune called 'Good Morning to All', composed by Kentucky kindergarten teacher Patty Hill and her sister Mildred in the 1890s. They wanted to make simple tunes for young children, and this particular ditty was meant to welcome them to the classroom each day. It could have morphed into 'Happy Birthday to You' on children's birthdays in that very school.

During the 20th century, the question of who authored the song became more complicated: in 1935 an American firm copyrighted 'Happy Birthday', claiming it was written by a Mrs R Forman, and academic and composer Preston Orem. By the Second World War, the song had featured in several Hollywood films and was plainly taken for granted. The war brought whimsical press reports of servicemen serenading

birthday boys in unlikely places, from a tank stranded under fire to a bomber dodging flak over Berlin.

In the 1980s, the rights were bought by Warner/Chappell Music, as public or media use reaped substantial royalty payments. This eventually led to a US court case over whether or not the tune remained in copyright or was now in the public domain. The case was settled in 2016, and the song is now in the public domain in the US and EU.

How the song first reached Britain remains unclear. It seems that the earliest reference to it in a UK newspaper is in a 1936 story about actor Henry Fonda organising a birthday party for the cast member of a movie being made here. It's probably safe to say that the song really caught on in Britain when holding birthday parties for children became increasingly commonplace in the interwar period.

Eugene Byrne is an author and journalist, specialising in history



ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN MCBETH

SAMANTHA'S RECIPE CORNER



Every issue, picture editor **Samantha Nott** brings you a recipe from the past. This month it's a cocktail that's perfect for clearing the palate before dinner

The Negroni

Typically drunk as an apéritif, the Negroni is a strong, bitter, gin-based cocktail with a distinctive and rich red colour. While nobody can be certain of the drink's origins, it's widely thought to have been invented at Caffè Casoni in Florence, Italy in 1919. Count Camillo Negroni, a colourful character who it's said became a cowboy in the USA in the 1920s and may not have been entitled to use a noble title, wanted to give his favourite cocktail, the Americano, more of a kick. He asked bartender Forsco Scarselli to substitute gin for the Americano's soda water. Scarselli obliged and, with a professional flourish, also replaced the Americano's lemon garnish with orange.

Whatever the truth behind this story – and others claim it was military man General Pascal-Olivier de Negroni (1829–1913) who invented the drink – customers soon began making their way to Caffè Casoni specifically to buy a Negroni. Sensing an opportunity, the Negroni family founded Negroni Distillerie in Treviso, Italy, and produced a ready-

made version of the drink, sold as Antico Negroni.

As for the drink's most famous aficionado, step forward Orson Welles. "The bitters are excellent for your liver, the gin is bad for you," he noted approvingly in 1947. "They balance each other."

INGREDIENTS

20ml gin
20ml sweet vermouth
20ml Campari
1 fresh orange peel

METHOD

Pour the gin, vermouth and Campari into a mixing glass. Add ice. Stir until the cocktail is chilled. Strain into a rocks glass. Garnish with an orange peel. If that sounds a little too strong, the Negroni *sbagliato* is made in the same way as the Negroni, but replace the gin with Prosecco.

VERDICT

"A grown-up cocktail with a complex taste. Treat with caution."

Difficulty: 2/10
Time: 5 minutes

Based on a recipe by the Gin Foundry. ginfoundry.com



Alessio Baldovinetti's c1465 *Portrait of a Lady* depicts a woman with a high hairline – a beauty ideal that could lead to painful practices

Q Why were women in Renaissance paintings depicted with prematurely receding hairlines?

A Renaissance women – like many of us today – suffered for their appearances. They were striving to meet an impossible ideal of female beauty, created by men. This was based on the writings of the influential poet Petrarch (1304–74). His works eulogise Laura, whom he loved but was unattainable because she was already married.

Petrarch praises Laura's high, wide forehead – one of the physical features that for him evoked her spiritual beauty and purity. You can see this feminine ideal reflected in countless Renaissance images of women, such as Alessio Baldovinetti's *Portrait of a Lady* (pictured above). As such, it's highly unlikely that this particular woman would have closely resembled the portrait made of her in real life.

At this time, your physical appearance was thought to reflect your soul, so real women would have worked hard to achieve bodily perfection. They commonly shaved their hairlines, or painstakingly removed individual hairs with tweezers. This took time and was very painful, so some women resorted to treatments involving vinegar mixed with alkaline substances such as quick lime or cat poo. This removed hair, but sometimes it took off their skin as well. Being conventionally beautiful took time and money – as it often does today – but it was also damaging to Renaissance women's faces and bodies.

Caroline Campbell is director of collections and research at the National Gallery

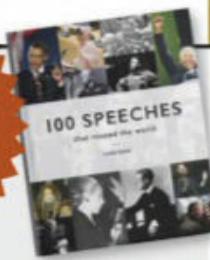
PRIZE CROSSWORD

What is the name
of this successful
Roman emperor?
(see 21 down)



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Across

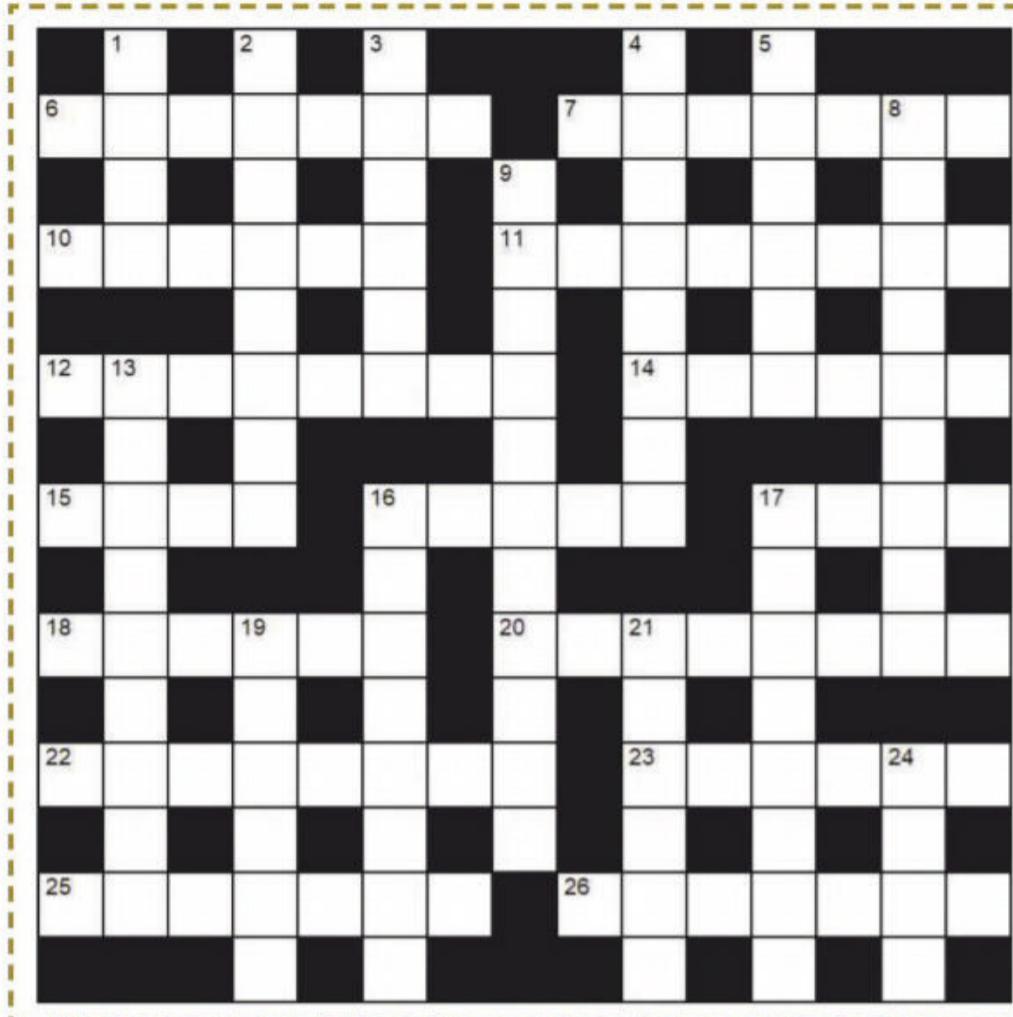
- 6** A variation of the name of England's first hospital for people with mental illnesses, part of the hospital's present-day name (7)
- 7** A state capital of the US, one end of a famous 19th-century wagon trail (5,2)
- 10** The 1861 battle at Fort ___ was the opening engagement of the American Civil War (6)
- 11** Nicholas ___, Elizabethan goldsmith and painter who raised the art of miniature portraiture to its highest level (8)
- 12** City in Punjab where British troops fired on hundreds of unarmed Indians in April 1919 (8)
- 14** Vast country that derives its name from the East Slavic state formed in the ninth century (6)
- 15** Legal institutions of London, which originated in the Middle Ages (4)
- 16** The site of a decisive English victory over the French in the first decade of the Hundred Years' War (5)
- 17** An ancient alcoholic drink, fermented from honey and water (4)
- 18** British newspaper started in 1964 which, after new ownership, became the country's bestselling tabloid (3,3)
- 20** The major Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation beginning around 1987 (8)
- 22** See 1 down
- 23** Popular Second World War name for British gun battery defences (3,3)
- 25** Examples include Paleolithic paintings dating back over 30,000 years (4,3)
- 26** A divorce scandal in 1890 ended the political career of this Irish advocate of Home Rule (7)



Who is this fashion trendsetter?
(see 1 down /22 across)

Down

- 1/22 across** English fashion trendsetter and friend of the Prince of Wales who died in poverty in



- France in 1840 (4,8)**
- 2** Serbian guerrilla force formed in 1941 against Axis powers, which sometimes collaborated, strategically, with those powers (8)
- 3** The location, near Paris, of France's pre-eminent porcelain factory in the 18th and 19th centuries (6)
- 4** The 2nd ___, a Whig politician, presided over the passage of the first Reform Act (4,4)
- 5** Followers of third-century BC philosopher Zeno of Citium (6)
- 8** ___ the Catholic, who, jointly with his queen, united the Spanish kingdoms (9)
- 9** A turning point in South Africa's history occurred here in 1960, with the shooting of about 250 black demonstrators (11)
- 13** Historical region of north-east China that has been a source of conflict between China, Japan and Russia (9)
- 16** Location chosen ahead of larger rival cities to become its country's

- capital, in the early 20th century (8)
- 17** Anglicised spelling of one of three key British military towns under siege in the South African War (8)
- 19/24 down** US firearms inventor and manufacturer who popularised the revolver (6,4)
- 21** Roman emperor, feted for his conquest of Dacia (6)
- 24** See 19 down

Compiled by Eddie James

SOLUTION TO OUR MARCH 2019 CROSSWORD

Across: 7 Eunuch 8 Bligh 9 Palgrave 10 Magellan 11 Dada 13 Thomas Jefferson

16 Elam 18 The Twist 21 Girondin 22 Casca 23 Fleming 24/6 Geneva Summit

Down: 1 Empire 2 Nicholas 3 Euclid 4 Sue Ryder 5 Shiva 6 Sabratha 9 Pinkerton 12 Botswana 14 Malcolm X 15 Fletcher 17 Medina 19 Wessex 20 Villa

FIVE WINNERS OF WOMEN: OUR HISTORY

JM Foxall, Birmingham; K McDiarmid, Berkshire; B Myers, Durham; D Wass, Nottinghamshire; RW Knox, Tyne and Wear

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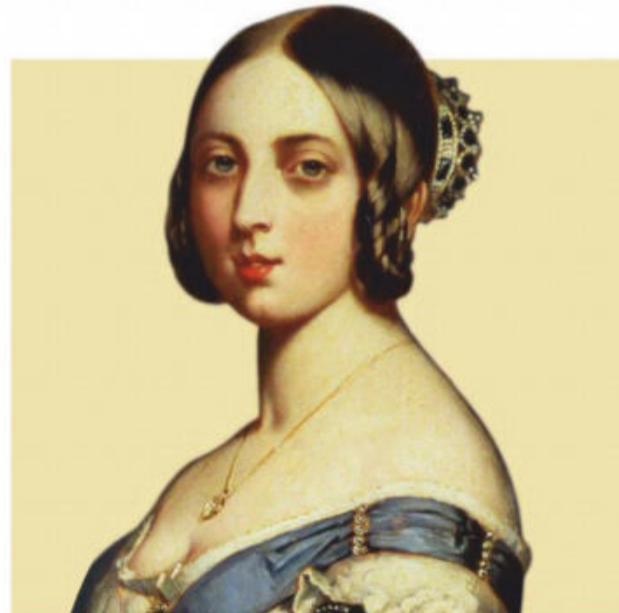
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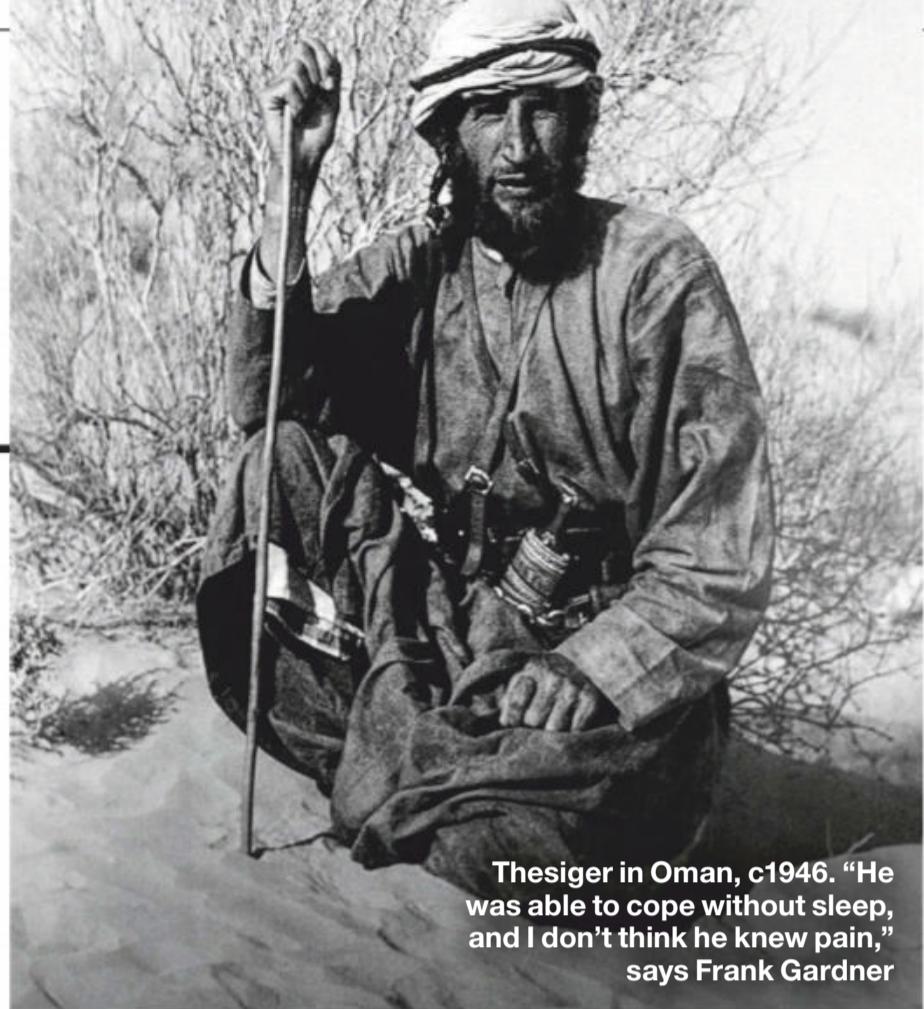


"Through his beautiful prose he was able to bring alive the life and times of civilisations and places that don't really exist anymore"

BBC journalist
Frank Gardner chooses

Wilfred Thesiger

1910-2003



Thesiger in Oman, c1946. "He was able to cope without sleep, and I don't think he knew pain," says Frank Gardner

Sir Wilfred Thesiger was a British explorer, writer and military officer. The Old Etonian is best known for his travel books such as *Arabian Sands* (1959), which tells the story of his foot and camel crossing of the Empty Quarter of the Arabian peninsula, and *The Marsh Arabs* (1964), about his time living in the marshes of Iraq. He served in the Special Operations Executive and the SAS during the Second World War. On his death in London, aged 93, he donated his collection of 38,000 travel photographs to the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

When did you first hear about Wilfred Thesiger?

My mother, who had met him in the 1950s, bumped into Thesiger on a London bus in 1977, when I was 16, and said I had to meet this inspirational figure. So we went along to see him at his flat in Chelsea and there he was waiting for us at the top of the stairs in a three-piece suit with a Victorian look about him and a watch on a chain. He invited us in for tea and I was absolutely mesmerised by his black and white photographs of Arabia, curved daggers and old camel saddles.

What made Thesiger a hero?

The extraordinary nature of his travels, not just in the Empty Quarter of Arabia, but in the Danakil Depression in what is today Ethiopia, which he visited on a daring mission at the age of just 23. He journeyed deep into territory where enemies were ambushed and had their testicles cut off – he braved that to discover the source of the Awash river. He later joined the SAS in the Western Desert [north Africa]. But first and foremost, it was the combination of his travels and also being able to bring alive, for a global English-speaking audience, the life and times of those civilisations and places that don't really exist anymore through his beautiful prose in books like *Arabian Sands* and *The Marsh Arabs*. I'm lucky to possess signed copies of both books.

What was Thesiger's finest hour?

He was awarded a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] in 1941, following the outbreak of the Second World War, in what was then Abyssinia, for his part in the capture of the fortress of Agbar and

its garrison of 2,500 Italian soldiers. After joining the SAS he later took part in desert raids behind enemy lines, and fought the Vichy French in Syria and Palestine. He also felt an enormous affinity with the desert people of southern Arabia, and spoke pretty good Arabic, having spent seven years living among the Marsh Arabs. They gave him the nickname 'Mubarak bin London', which means 'Blessed One – son of London'.

Is there anything you don't particularly admire about him?

I argued with him a few times and my two big criticisms of him are that he wasn't interested in anybody's stories but his own (he wasn't a great listener); and his opposition to anything modern (he absolutely loathed technology, and his one abiding hatred was what he called the internal combustion engine).

Can you see any parallels between his life and your own?

I share his love of adventure in wild places, and I too immersed myself in Bedouin life for a few months in my 20s – although I would never put myself on the same pedestal as him in terms of stamina and endurance. He'd eat anything, was able to cope without sleep and I don't think he knew pain.

Do you think we'll see his like again?

His mantra was very much 'I saw a world that you could never see because it's gone'. But there is always going to be something worth exploring, just in a different way. Look at modern explorers like Benedict Allen. The difference about Thesiger was that he didn't have a team setting stuff up for him; he did it himself. H

Frank Gardner was talking to York Membery

Frank Gardner is the BBC's security correspondent. His latest novel, *Ultimatum*, is out in paperback in May. His memoir, *Blood and Sand*, is also available. Twitter: @FrankRGardner

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Thank you, Sylvia

Sylvia left a gift in her Will to help conquer Stroke

The first we knew of Sylvia was when we received notification of the gift she'd left us in her Will. Shortly after, a beautiful story of a much-loved woman began to unfurl.

Friends remembered Sylvia's kind-heart and her wish to help others. She spent part of her adult-life caring for her mother, and developed a passion

for medicine. Becoming a medical secretary was her next step and, in the course of her career, she discovered the devastating impact a stroke could have on people and their families. She saw that research and treatment were vastly under-funded, and she decided to remember the Stroke Association in her Will.

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If you would like to learn more about remembering the Stroke Association in your Will, please get in touch.

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